After Magnus

Who can dethrone the World Chess Champion?

By ANISH GIRI

NEW IN CHESS

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Twenty more years?

After his landslide victory in Shamkir last April, Magnus Carlsen returned home in a buoyant mood. In an interview on Norwegian television, the World Champion said that if he kept the right motivation, he might stay at the top for another 20 years. Wow! That's quite a statement of intent and a very long time in today's rapidly changing world, where even peeks into the not too distant future tend to be tenuous. But who could blame Carlsen? After all, he's been dominating top-level chess with an iron fist, and he rightly highlighted the lack of consistency of his potential rivals. They may have their great moments, such as Fabiano Caruana's stunning '7-0' performance in St. Louis last year, but all too often they do not follow through on such successes.

And yet on the other hand, during his next big tournament, Norway Chess, a small crack appeared in the seemingly unbreachable Carlsen armour. Now suddenly the Norwegian appears very human and potentially vulnerable after one of his worst results ever.

When Bobby Fischer, Garry Kasparov and Magnus Carlsen burst onto the chess scene, there was no doubt whatsoever about their destiny: sooner or later they were going to be World Champion. Nothing or no one was going to stop them from achieving this aim. How different is the current situation, when there seems to be no such player around.

On the following pages, Anish Giri presents ten players that could possibly challenge Magnus Carlsen's hegemony in the years ahead. Or perhaps may not. It's not a Top-10, it's not a list carved in stone. When we discussed the selection criteria, it was clear that it helped if a player was young, under or around 20. Therefore Anish didn't include giants like Levon Aronian or Vladimir Kramnik, although I think we can safely say that he would never preclude the possibility that one day they could very well play for the highest title (again).

As a sign of the times, reflecting the recent successes of their national team, China is represented by their 'Three Musketeers'. All three are there for very good reasons; although particularly of interest is 16-year-old Wei Yi, being widely regarded as the one having more potential promise.

And as could be expected, the author was not afraid to take liberties. Richard Rapport is still a far cry from being even a potential threat to Carlsen, but the Hungarian's unorthodox opening experiments are certainly a sign of overoptimistic youthfulness (as witness the painfully clear thrashing he received at the recent Biel festival).

Needless to say, Anish didn't include himself. After all, Fischer didn't include himself either when, in 1964, in the short-lived American magazine *Chessworld*, he presented us with his 10 greatest masters in history.

But obviously we at New In Chess believe that our contributing editor has the talent and ambition to play a fighting role for the highest title. Anish Giri's wide knowledge and deep understanding of the game shines through in his observations about his colleagues and in his lucid and witty notes to their games. In this enjoyable games collection he not only shares an insider's views about the cream of today's chess, he also provides the reader with valuable lessons in all phases of the game.

Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam,
editor-in-chief New In Chess
The Hague, August 2015

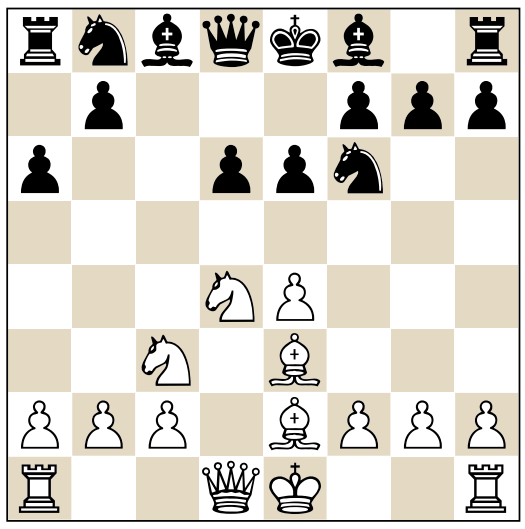
Wei Yi

If you want to speculate on who is the likely new hero to dethrone Magnus Carlsen, and you are sick of the current world top ten, then Wei Yi is definitely someone you would want on your list. The mysterious 16-year-old Chinese wunderkind has already climbed to the dizzy heights of 2700, and now has his eyes firmly set on a higher goal. Although I remain a little sceptical, I have heard many esteemed players informing me that he is the future of our beloved sport. My Chinese agent, a top player himself, has claimed that Wei Yi is more talented than all of them put together, and this is reason enough to watch out for this boy. His first breakthrough came when he eliminated Ian Nepomniachtchi and Alexey Shirov in the 2013 World Cup in Tromsø. Well done; although back then, he was 13 and I agree with Evgeny Bareev, who said in an interview that followed, that 'losing to him was not necessary yet.' Nevertheless, here we go.

B84
Wei Yi
Alexey Shirov
Tromsø 2013

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6
Alexey doesn't have a very stable repertoire against 1.e4 lately, but the Najdorf has always been one of his favourite weapons and it should suit his style too.
6.♗e3 e6 7.♗e2!?
This side-line has become reasonably popular lately. White is toying around, keeping both options open on which side to castle.

'My Chinese agent, a top player himself, has claimed that Wei Yi is more talented than all of them put together.'

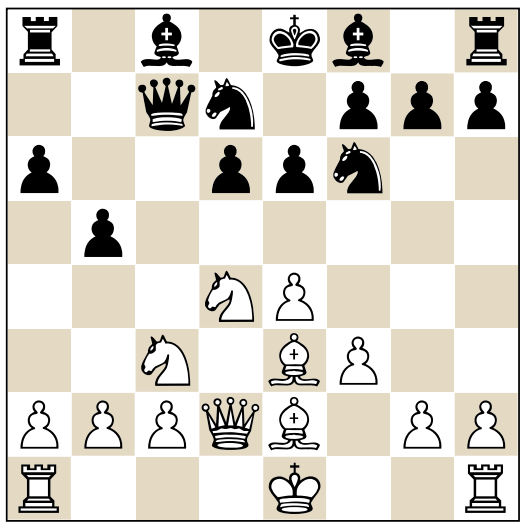


7...♕c7 Black has to prepare b5 one way or the other.
The immediate 7...b5?! is considered dubious due to 8.♗f3! ♗b7? 9.e5!

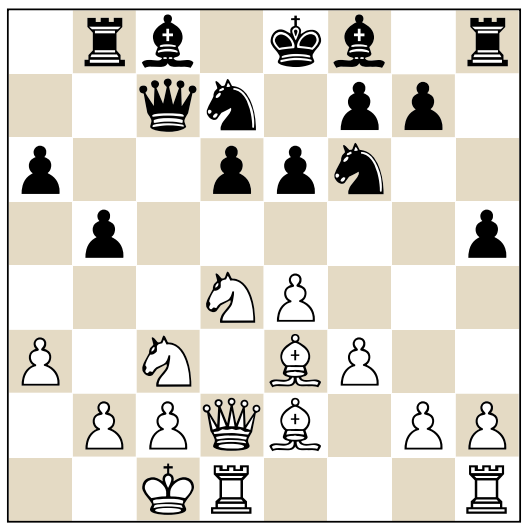
Wei Yi
Born: June 2, 1999
Country: China
Rating (August 1, 2015): 2725

Remarkable:
At the age of 13 years, 8 months and 23 days, Wei Yi became a grandmaster, the fourth youngest in history.

8.♕d2
There are many alternatives here, as the theory of this system is somewhat rather vague at the moment.
8...b5
Black is obviously ready for this push with his queen now on c7, as ♗f3 is strongly answered by ...♗b7.
9.f3 ♘bd7
There are many such Sicilian lines where the question is whether to go first play ...♘bd7 or ...♗b7 – this variation of the Najdorf is one of them.



10.a3
There was a time when Kasparov literally would laugh at anyone who played a3 in the English Attack, but nowadays this move has got a blessing of the engines, so players don't hesitate so much to play it.
10...h5!?
This idea also has Houdini's 'blessing'. In fact, it's interesting how this engine called Houdini, known to be full of positional bugs, has shaped the trends in the opening theory. But this is a serious subject which deserves a separate publication.
11.0-0-0 ♖b8
It is a common wisdom that once the pawn is on a3, Black shouldn't close the b-file with ...♗b7, but the flexible 11...♗e7 deserved some attention here.

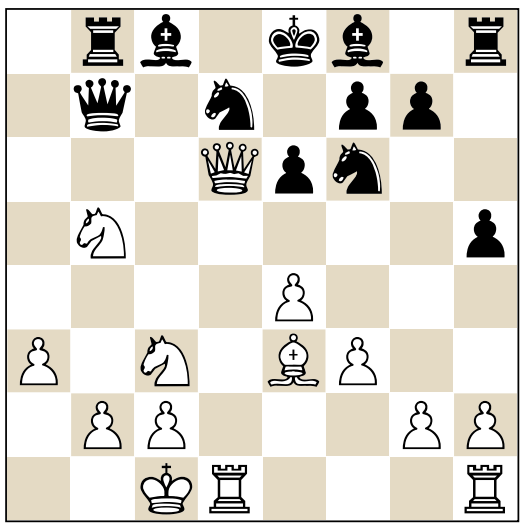


12.♗xb5
It's déjà vu here for Shirov, as he also faced this sacrifice against Viktor Bologan back in 2005.
Tempting looks 12.♘dxb5, but it is less attractive since after 12...axb5 13.♘xb5 ♖xb5! (13...♕b7 14.♕c3! looks bad for Black) 14.♗xb5 ♗e7, Black's d6-pawn stays intact and White does not have much of an initiative, although the position is very unclear anyway.
12...axb5 13.♘dxb5 ♕b7

Sixteen-year-old Wei Yi: China's answer to Magnus Carlsen?

Now the standard ♘xd6+ is not very appealing, as there's an x-ray attack on the b2-pawn. But White has another way of capturing the pawn.

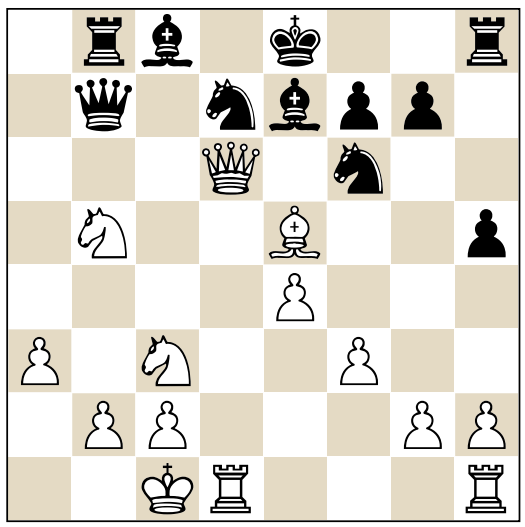
14.♕xd6!



14...♗xd6?

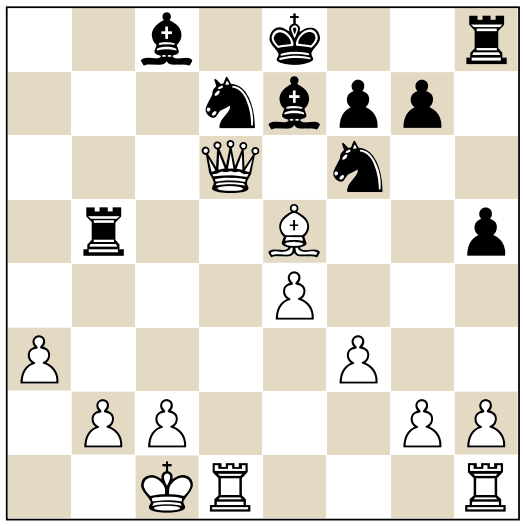
A novelty, deviating from the aforementioned game from 2005 between Bologan-Shirov; but not really improving on it.

Much better was what Shirov originally played back in 2005, with 14...♗e7 15.♗f4 e5 16.♗xe5



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

Perhaps it is here where Black should consider deviating from the Bologan-Shirov stem game, although the queen sac did give Black victory after: 16...♕xb5 (16...♔f8!?) 17.♘xb5 ♖xb5



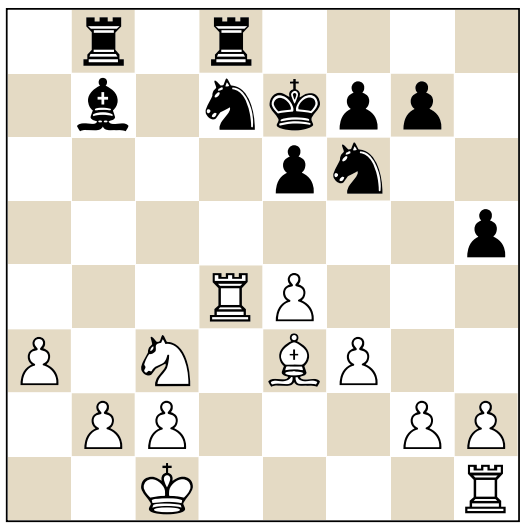
ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

with four pieces for the queen and four pawns. What a mess!

15.♘xd6+ ♔e7 16.♘xb7 ♗xb7

As a rule, when White has got pawns on e4 and f3 being an efficient block against both the f6-knight and b7-bishop, the three queenside pawns promise him an advantage in the endgame. This game hasn't altered that opinion.

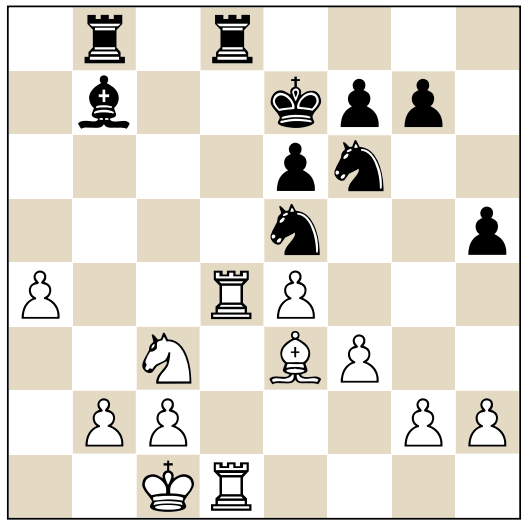
17.♖d4 ♖hd8



Probably the other set-up with the rooks is more effective: 17...♖hc8! 18.♖hd1 ♖a8!? 19.a4 ♗a6 and Black has covered many squares, and it's not clear exactly how White is to proceed here, as b3 is not possible and neither is ♘b5.

18.♖hd1 ♘e5 19.a4

Exchanging all the rooks was possible, but I agree with Wei Yi that there is no need for him to take such drastic decisions.



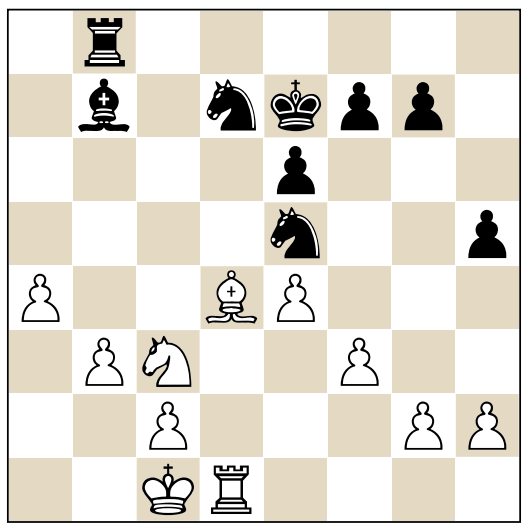
19...♖xd4

And I'm not sure whether Black also wants to swap off this rook – but once again, it's hard to judge such a decision.

Instead, I would have played here 19...♘fd7!?

20.♗xd4 ♘fd7 21.b3

Also possible was the more energetic thrust with 21.b4, but it does create in its wake a big hole on c4 that possibly could be exploited.



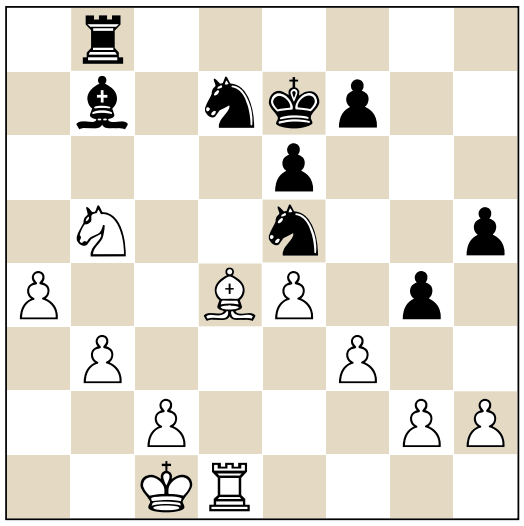
21...g5!

There's a power of thematic coun-

terplay in this pawn structure, and Alexey proves himself to be truly a world-class player here.

22.♘b5 g4?

This allows a nasty and perhaps overlooked regroupment. What was needed was 22...♗c6!, planning to disturb the outpost for White's beautiful knight: 23.♘a7 ♗b7 24.♗b2 and here, one more good move of 24...♗a6! prevents the knight from coming back to its ideal location on b5. Here White has no easy way to proceed, and Black would be back in the game.



23.♗b2!

Nicely spotted! Suddenly, the three pieces that White has start working well together as a unit, and Black's king no longer feels secure.

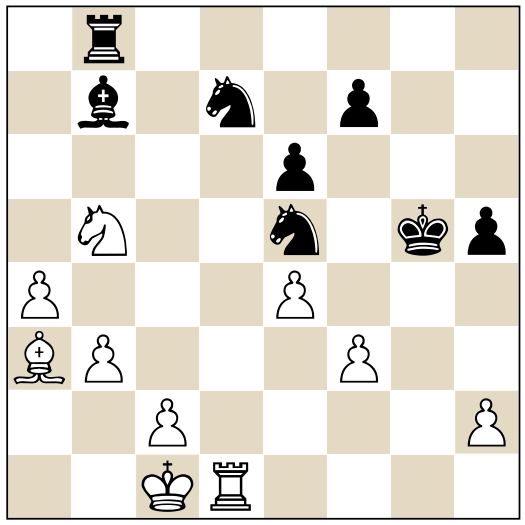
And a good job too, as the alternative 23.f4 ♘g6 24.f5 ♘ge5 was getting White nowhere.

23...gxf3 24.♗a3+ ♔f6

Also bad was 24...♔d8. After 25.♗d6 ♖a8 26.♗xe5 fxg2 27.♗f6+ ♔c8 28.♗d4, although the g-pawn has made a career for itself, it will definitely end there. Having said that, it was a possible way of playing for Black.

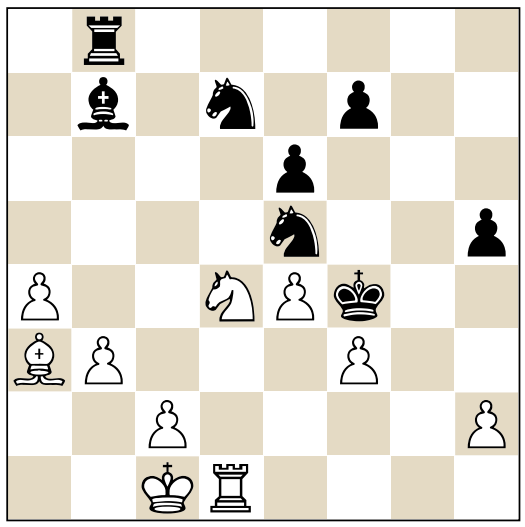
25.gxf3 ♔g5!

The only move – and a nice one too, as the king takes care of its own problems, at a time when there is no-one else to do so!



26.♘d4 ♗a6?!

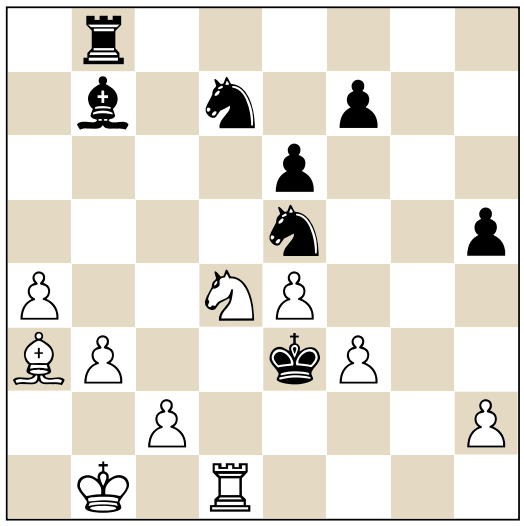
It's hard to criticise Alexey here, because by now he's ended up in some serious trouble, but he did have an interesting chance here with 26...♔f4!. This would be quite cheeky, but actually not so bad. The king is not as safe in the opponent's camp as in the Japanese game of Shogi, but nevertheless it's not getting mated either.



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

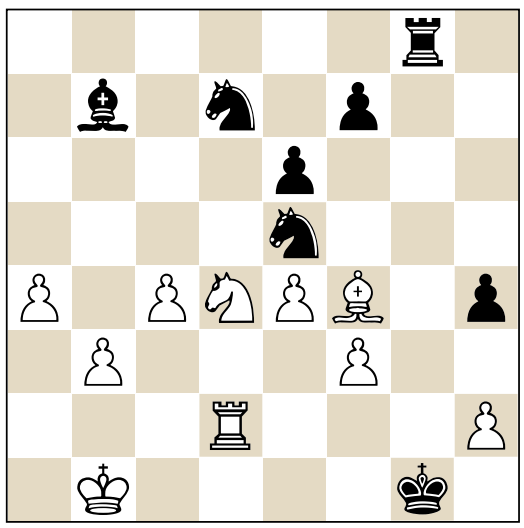
27.♔b1 (if 27.♗d6 ♖g8 28.♖d3 appears strong, but after 28...♖g2 the

h-pawn is in some danger. 29.♖c3 ♗a6 30.♖c7 ♔e3 and Black has his share of chances here) 27...♔e3!



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

28.♗c1+ ♔f2 and for all I know, the 'Steinitzian king' is reasonably active here – and if it isn't getting into trouble, it might as well cause some confusion in the White camp. I was actually about to put an exclamation mark to this move as well, but since I realised it's physically the only move in the position, I decided not to exaggerate. 29.♗f4 (29.♖d2+ ♔f1!) 29...h4! 30.♖d2+ ♔g1 31.c4 ♖g8!

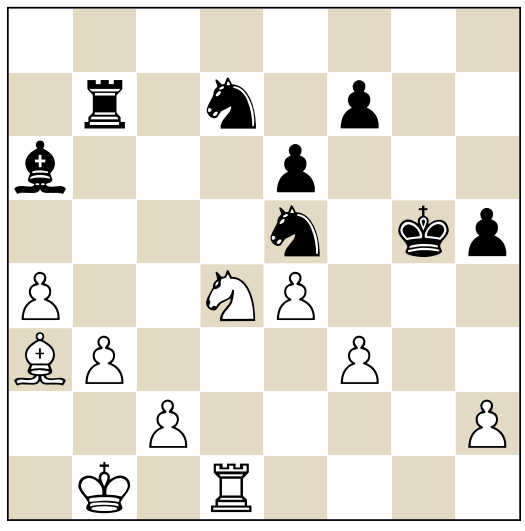


ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

and Black does have counterplay with ...♖g2 coming, though the queenside pawn mass should guarantee that it is White who is playing for a win.

27.♔b1 ♖b7?

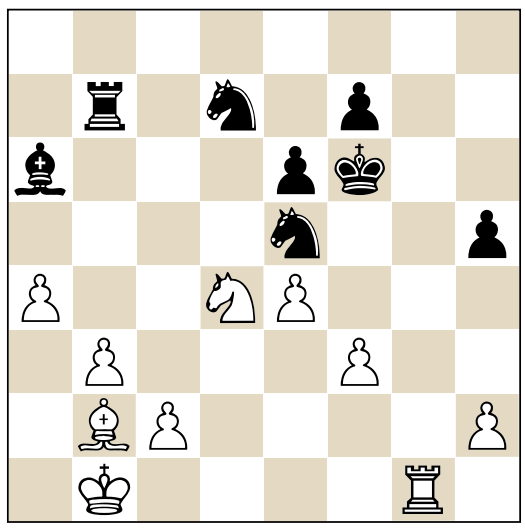
Now the Black king will be driven back home. Alexey had to try something desperate here, such as 27...♔h4!? which in fact isn't really as bad as it first seems!: 28.f4 ♘c4 29.♗e7+ ♔h3 with some real counterplay, although White again is still the one calling the shots here.



28.♖g1+! ♔f6

Going forward would mean mate with 28...♔f4 29.♗c1 mate, or 28...♔h4 29.f4 ♘g4 30.♘f3+ ♔h3 31.♖g3 mate.

29.♗b2



29...♔e7

Now that the situation has stabilised,

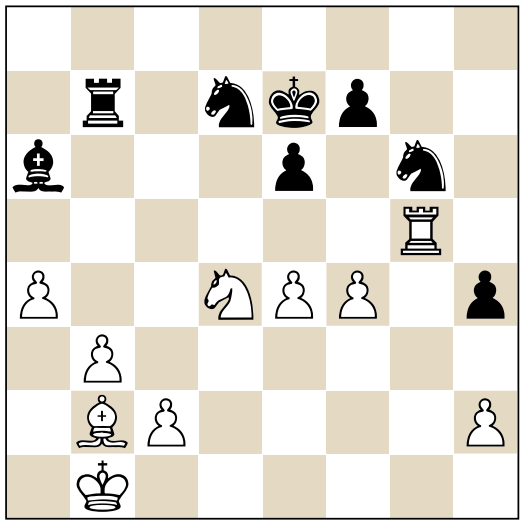
White is going to pick up some of the weaknesses on the kingside, which was indeed efficiently done by Wei Yi here.

The alternative 29...♘g6 would have lost material after 30.♘f5+ ♘de5 31.♘d6 ♖d7 32.f4! ♖xd6 (32...♘xf4 33.♘e8+ ♔e7 34.♗xe5 ♘g6 35.♘f6 and White's easily winning here) 33.fxe5+ ♘xe5 34.h4 followed by ♖g5 picks off the pinned knight.

30.♖g5 h4 31.f4

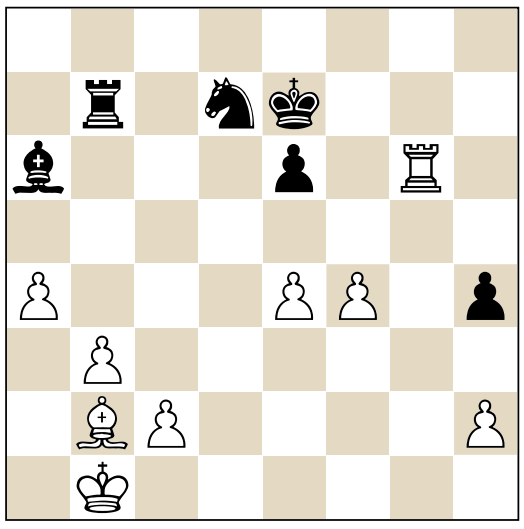
Some tactics are a-coming...

31...♘g6



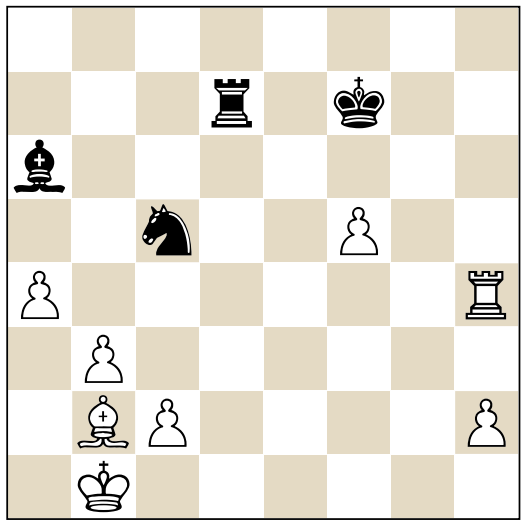
32.♘xe6! Easy, yet nice.

32...fxe6 If 32...♔xe6 33.f5+ and wins. **33.♖xg6**

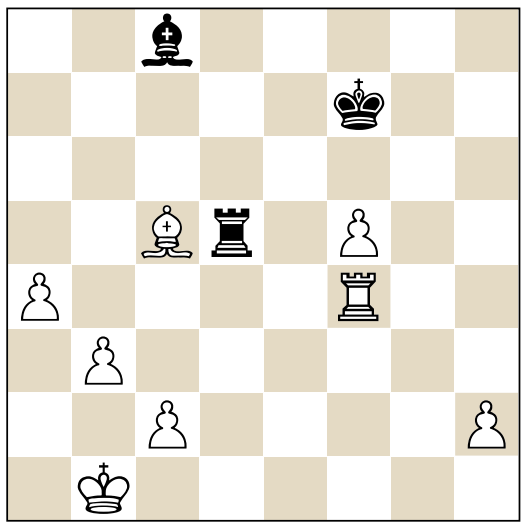


Now White is really having too many pawns, as the h4-pawn is also weak, not even to mention the poor coordination of the black pieces. By the time Black manages to pull his forces together, White will already have five pawns for the piece.

33...♘c5 34.f5 ♔f7 35.♖f6+ ♔e7 36.♖h6 ♔f7 37.♖xh4 exf5 38.exf5 ♖d7 The rest is a matter of simple technique and Wei Yi does it extremely cautiously, yet leaves no chance for Alexey.

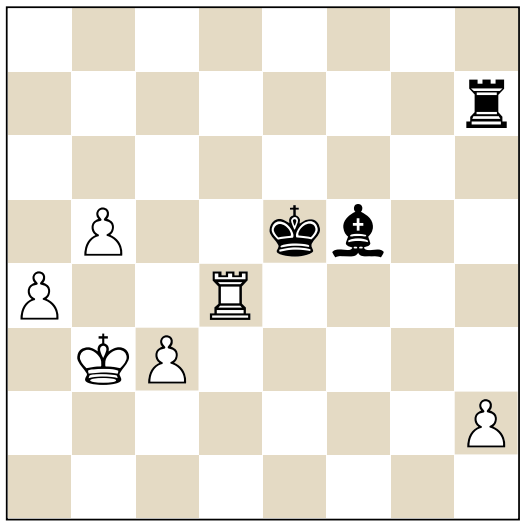


39.♗d4 ♖d5 40.♖f4 ♗c8 41.♗xc5!? Simple chess.



41...♖xc5 42.♔b2 ♔f6 43.b4 ♖c7 44.♔b3 ♗xf5 45.c3 ♖h7 46.b5! ♔e5 47.♖d4!

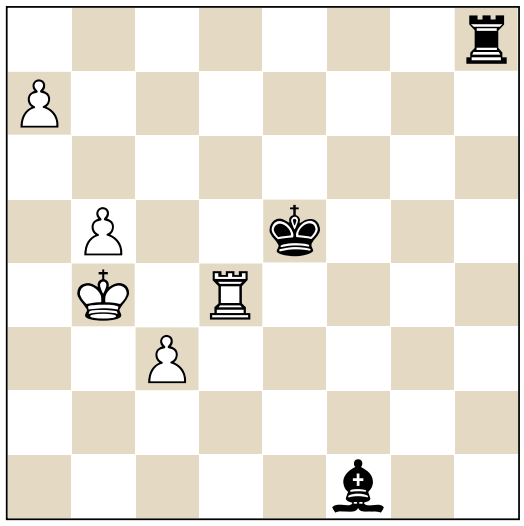
Giving up the kingside pawns and focussing on the queenside pawn mass. A very strong decision.



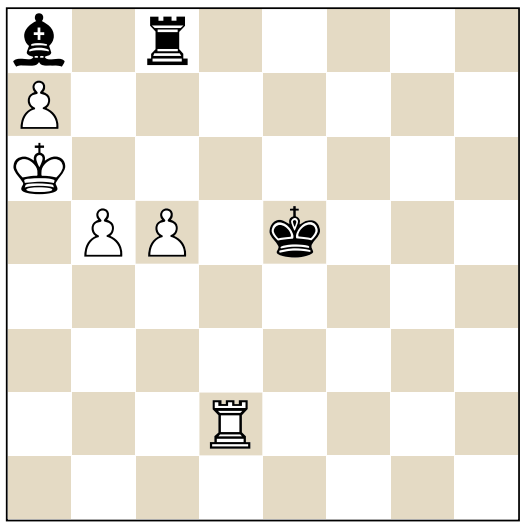
A nice game, and not a bad way to celebrate your debut in the World Cup, as a 13-year-old inflicting the double whammy of knocking out Shirov right after Nepo!

47...♖xh2 48.a5 ♗h3 49.a6 ♗f1 50.a7 ♖h8 51.♔b4

The rest is easy.



51...♗g2 52.♖d2 ♗f3 53.♔a5 ♖c8 54.♖d3 ♗g2 55.♔a6 ♖f8 56.♖d2 ♗a8 57.c4 ♖c8 58.c5



Black resigned.

Richard Rapport

Chess can very much be crazy, and the likes of Richard Rapport are there to prove it. Working quite a lot on chess (at least that's what I've heard), I wonder what exactly does he spend his time on, as he continuously refuses to obey any of the rules that generations of gifted chess players have been trying to establish. With creativity bursting out like Eyjafjallajökull in the spring of 2010, the openings of Richard are clearly over the top. This is definitely aimed first and foremost to get his opponents out of their comfort zone and to clearly issue a serious statement. In fact, when things settle down, Richard is often showing some famous Hungarian technique, but usually he doesn't give himself a chance to reach that point. When I asked one of the legends of our game about his take on the play of Richard Rapport, he said: 'Well, if it works, it works. The problem is, it usually doesn't.' That may be true, but Richard is still a junior and having entered the 2700 club he's surely got a career ahead of himself. For now, however, I'll present one example of when things didn't work out. At least not for him.

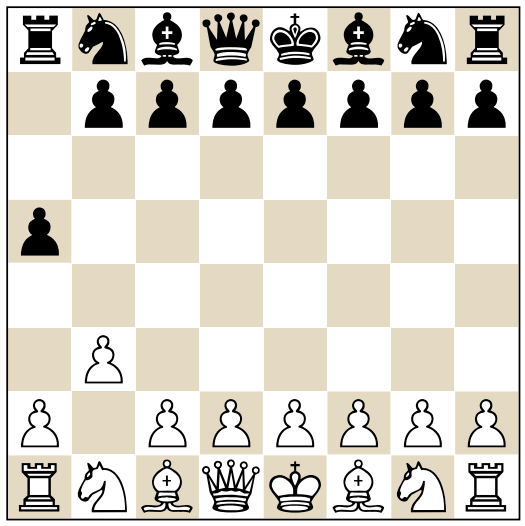
When I asked one of the legends of our game about his take on the play of Richard Rapport, he said: 'Well, if it works, it works. The problem is, it usually doesn't.'

A01
Richard Rapport
Ahmed Adly
Tsaghkadzor 2015

1.b3!?

Nowadays this has almost become the mainstream... Is what I will probably write someday, when Kramnik starts digging in this direction – but for now, this is still quite fresh, at least for someone as boring as me.

1...a5!?



Game on, buddy! The problem with

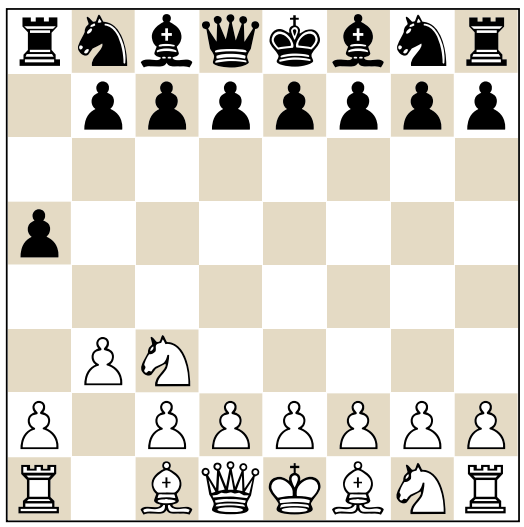
Richard Rapport
Born: March 25, 1996
Country: Hungary
Rating (August 1, 2015): 2671

Remarkable:
At the age of 13 years, 11 months and 6 days, he became a grandmaster, the fifth youngest in history.

extravagant lines like 1.b3 is that even when Black replies with some nonsense, White is still often unable to prove any opening advantage. But what the hell, let's just sit back and enjoy the show!

2.e4! Yup, playing in the centre. Richard won't be distracted too long though, and soon he will shift back to the flanks...

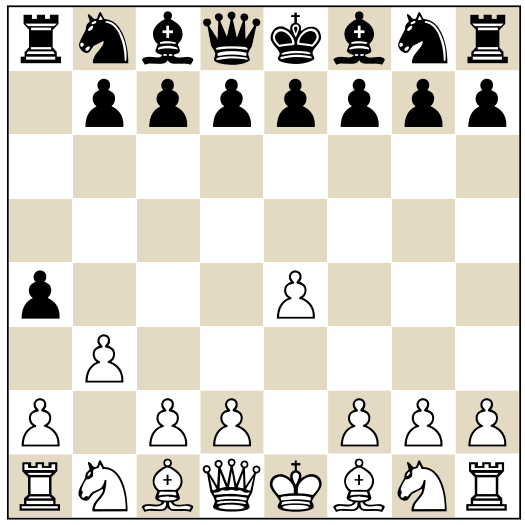
My candidate move would have been 2.♘c3



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

Now let's see how I am at this 'free-styling': 2...e5 3.♘f3 ♘c6 4.♗b2 ♘f6 5.d4!? e4 6.d5! Believe it or not, but this is typical. 6...♘b4 7.♘g5 e3! 8.f4! c6 9.d6! a4 10.a3 ♘bd5 11.g3 and I like White here.

2...a4



3.b4!?

I am not a big fan of this move, as I feel that White should have let Black waste time with his a-pawn. But then again, the players have entered a special game, within the game of chess, the so-called creativity display, where each player is trying to prove he is more creative and absurd than the other.

Also, I thought a sweet approach was 3.♗a3!?, followed by ♘c3, though after 3...g6!? it makes sense to return with 4.♗b2!? ♘f6 5.e5 with a crazy house. White lost a tempo, but I doubt that …a5-a4 is such a useful way to exploit that.

Best though should be the natural 3.♗b2, when after 3...e6 Black is threatening to push …a3 at some point: 4.♘f3 a3 5.♗c1! d5 6.e5! and here, we can see the damage that the rapidly advanced a3-pawn has done to Black, as he can no longer play the standard …c7-c5 which would contribute to his fight for the centre.

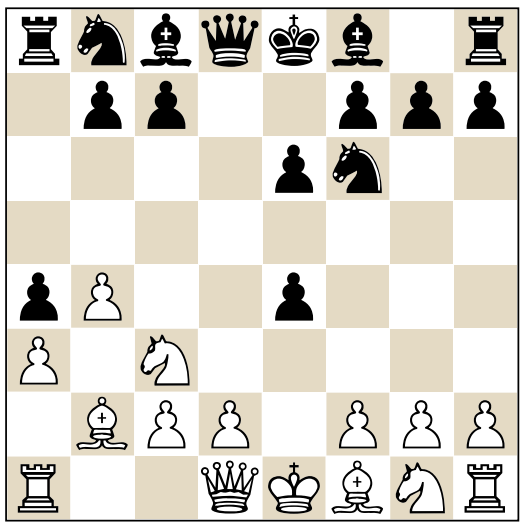
3...e6 4.♗b2 d5 5.a3!?

Richard Rapport continuously refuses to obey any of the rules that generations of gifted chess players have been trying to establish.

This is the first really risky move by White. There is a gambit that a chess organizer likes to try out against the top players: 1.e4 e6 2.b3!? d5 3.♗b2 and here one might argue that White has a better version. I am not really all that sure.

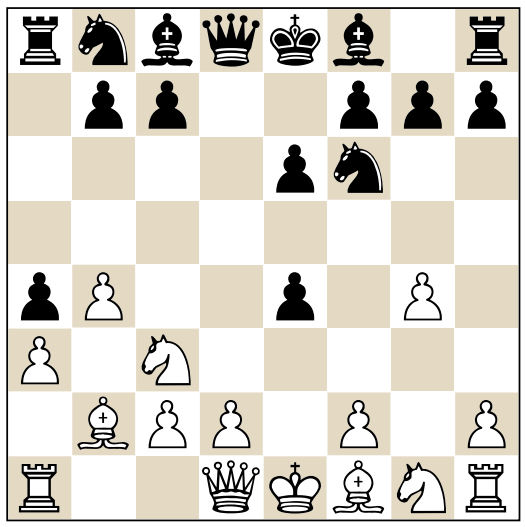
Rapport had the simple way to play with 5.exd5 exd5 6.♘f3 ♘f6 7.a3 – but the position is surprisingly dull.

5...dxe4 6.♘c3 ♘f6



7.g4!? Still following the creativity spirit of his earlier moves. I don't see the need for it, but so far so good – White hasn't gotten himself into any real trouble as yet.

What did, though, make more sense to me was 7.♕e2!?



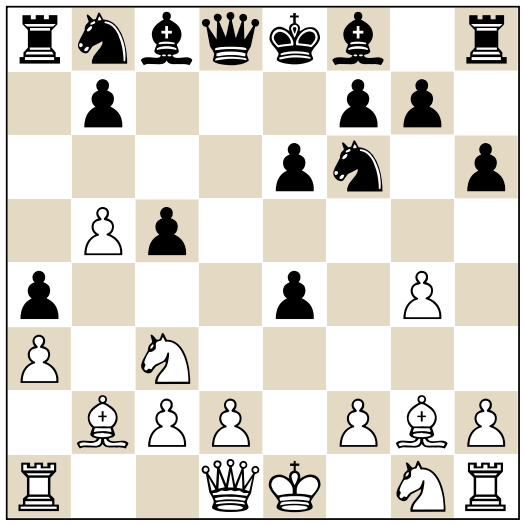
7...c5!?

An interesting decision by Adly – well played!

8.b5 What else? Now the question remains as to which pawn will be weak, a4 or b5?

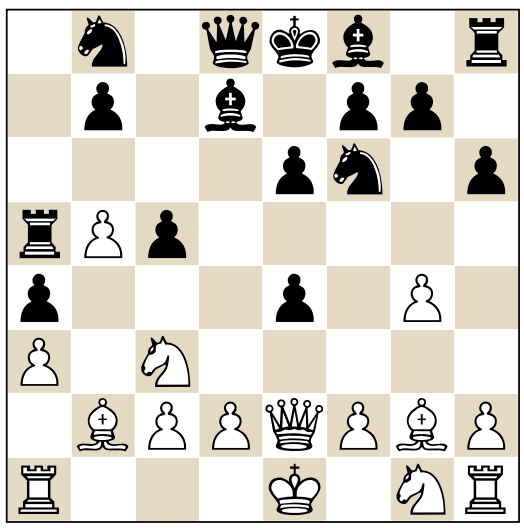
8...h6 9.♗g2 I don't like this move, ignoring the b5-pawn.

More flexible was 9.♕e2!? In fact, Richard has created a mess out of his position and he isn't handling it too well. Here, White would have been doing alright from the objective standpoint.



9...♖a5! Well spotted by Adly, immediately seeing the weakness in White's position. The Egyptian star seems like a nice party guy, but turns out he can be quite creative too.

10.♕e2 ♗d7!

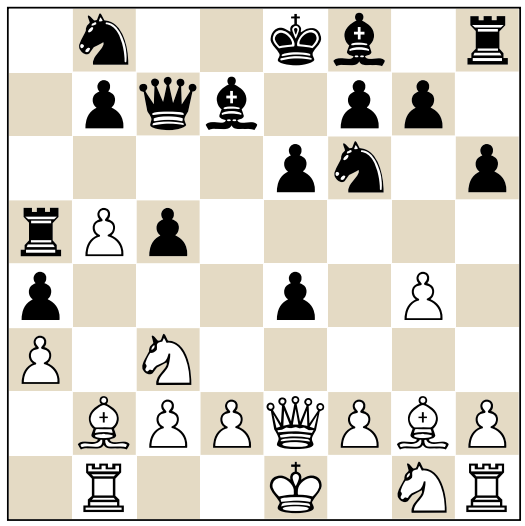


Now White can't properly recapture the pawn, but on the other hand the b8-knight looks pretty depressed.

11.♖b1 Trying to indirectly hang on to the pawn.

However, owning up to the original mistake with 11.♘h3!? ♕b6 12.♗f1 would have been a sad admission.

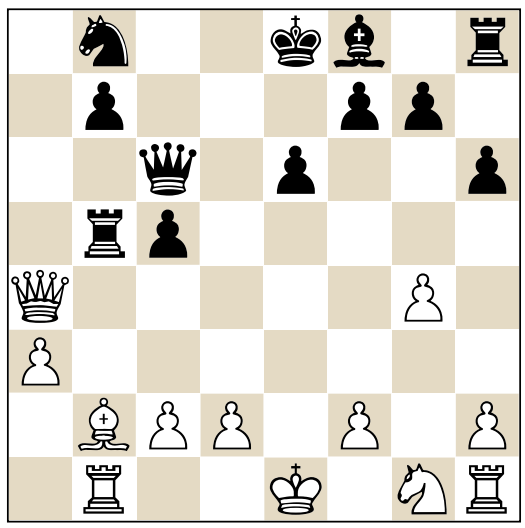
11...♕c7



12.♗xe4? This is plain and simply bad – Richard must surely have missed the strong resource of 17...c4! later in the game.

What had to be played here was 12.♘h3!? trying to use White's main trump, which is now being ahead in development, such as: 12...c4 13.0-0 Admittedly it's a mess, though Black shouldn't be too concerned after some normal moves like 13...♗e7 (or 13...♗d6)

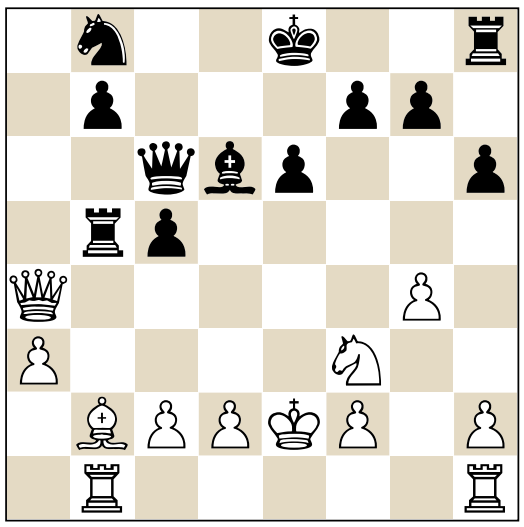
12...♘xe4 13.♕xe4 ♗xb5 14.♘xb5 ♖xb5 15.♕xa4 ♕c6



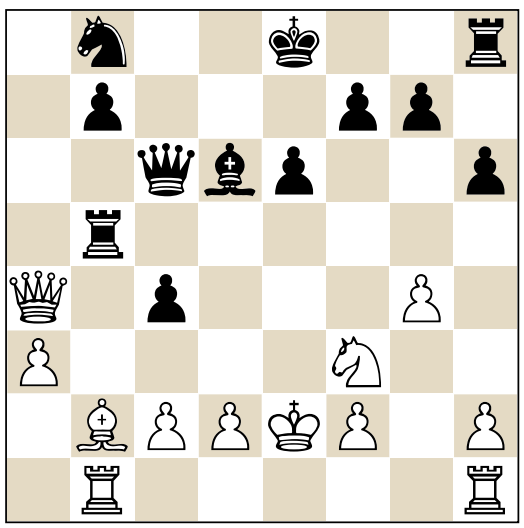
16.♘f3 This idea is what probably seduced Richard.

16...♗d6 17.♔e2 Maybe this is what Richard was counting on? But if so, he was missing the point.

But then what options does he have, as 17.0-0 0-0 is just lost for White. Apparently not just lost but completely lost! And we soon see why: 18.♔g2 (the game continuation winning resource also works after 18.♘e1: 18…c4!) 18...♕b6!



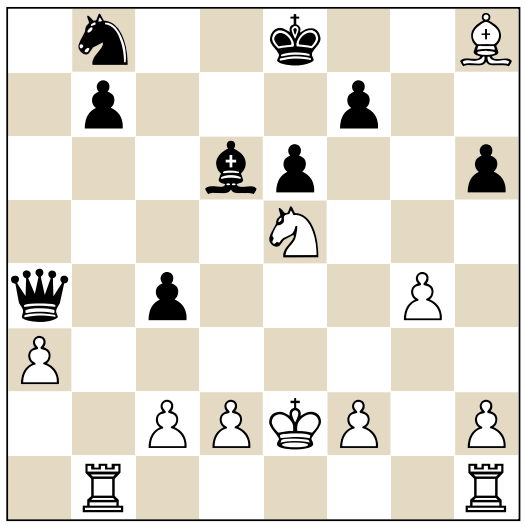
17...c4! Oops, suddenly ... ♖e5+ is a deadly threat.



18.♗xg7 Played in desperation more than anything else.

But then again, the very sad queen sally 18.♕a7 loses to 18...h5! softening up the kingside, creating some new weaknesses for White: 19.g5 b6 (threatening ...♖a5) 20.♗d4 ♖f5

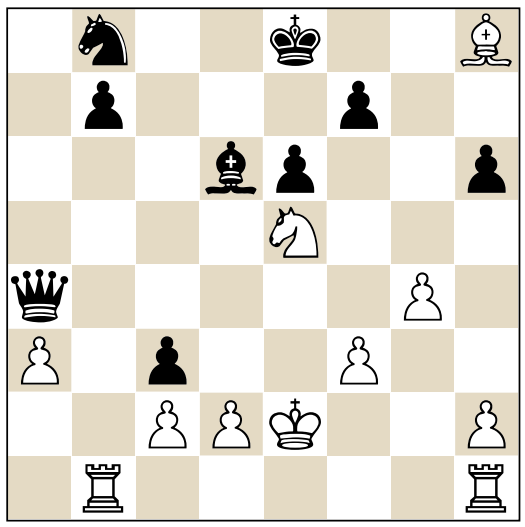
18...♖e5+! 19.♘xe5 ♕xa4 20.♗xh8



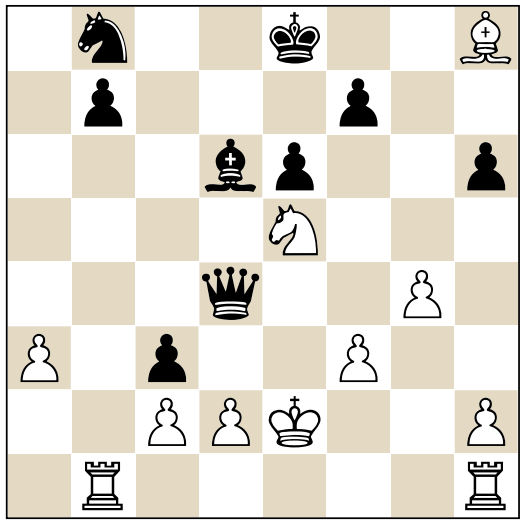
20...c3!?

Continuing the creative curve – but there was a simpler and stronger solution with 20...♕xc2 And although White has numeric equality with the material imbalance, he is so incredibly uncoordinated with a very weak king that he is basically lost: 21.f3! The only way to hang on. And now Black should just simplify here with: 21...♗xe5! 22.♗xe5 ♘c6 23.♗c3 ♕d3+ 24.♔f2 ♘d4! 25.♗xd4 ♕xd4+ and Black will pick up more pawns quicker than you can imagine. 26.♔g3 ♕d6+!

21.f3



21...♕f4? This looks like a clever double attack, but Adly had missed a strong resource. The clinically precise move was 21...♕d4!

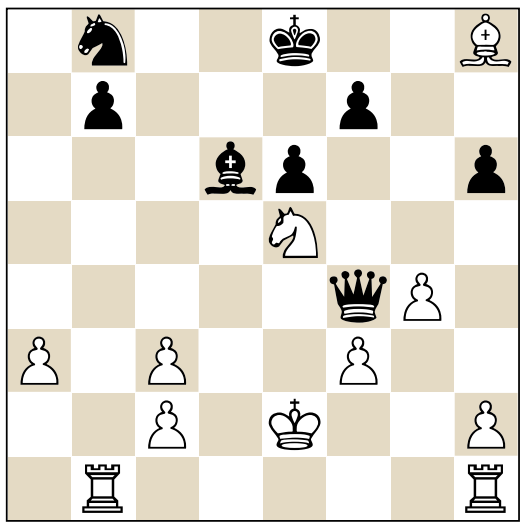


ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

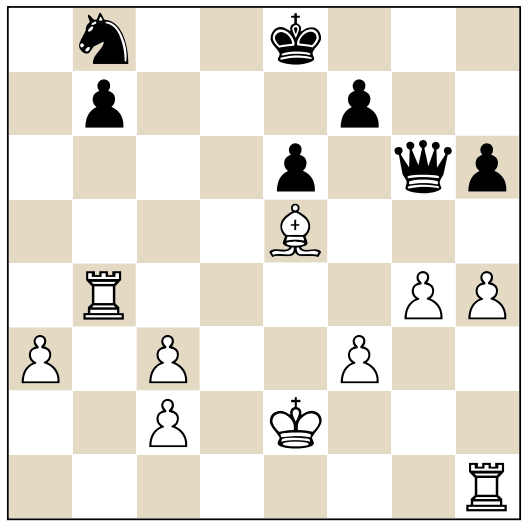
Now after 22.dxc3 ♕xc3 23.f4 ♗c5, Black holds all the trumps, and eventually White is bound to lose material with such a weak king and all his pieces being uncoordinated and clumsy.

22.dxc3!

Now suddenly it appears that ...♗xe5 is strongly met by ♖b4. Hang on, can White suddenly be surviving this?!

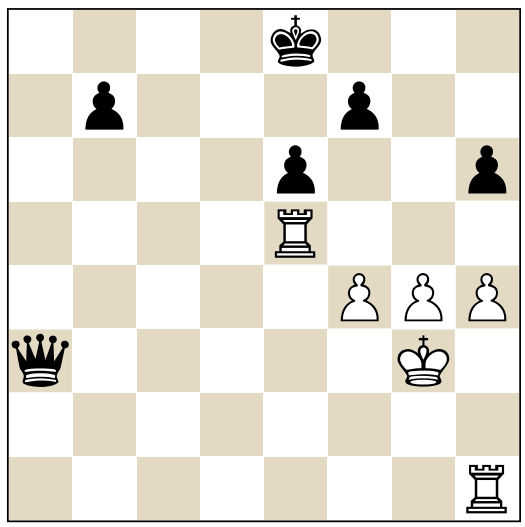


22...♗c5 Seeing that something has gone wrong, Adly tries to still create some threats against the king – but it's no longer the same, as basically he's lost his important c-pawn and a couple of tempi. Instead, 22...♗xe5 23.♖b4 ♕g5 24.h4 is not the end to the story, but overall I believe that White should be able to hold this: 24...♕g6! 25.♗xe5



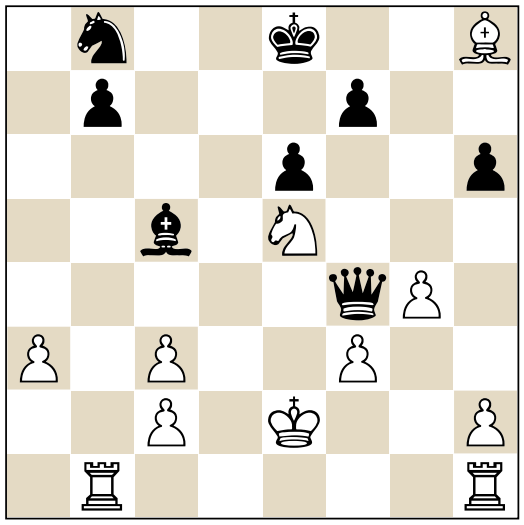
ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

25...♘c6 (a nastier try might well be 25...♕xc2+!?, but things are far from easy here too: 26.♔e3 ♘c6 27.♗f6!? ♘xb4 28.axb4) 26.♖e4 ♘xe5 27.♖xe5 ♕xc2+ 28.♔e3 ♕xc3+ 29.♔f4 ♕d2+ 30.♔g3 ♕d6 31.f4 ♕xa3+

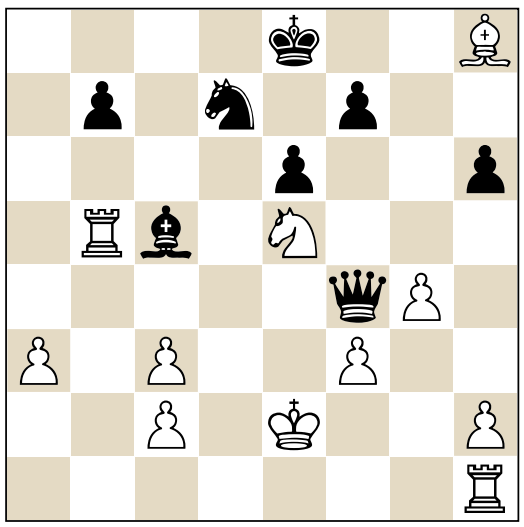


ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

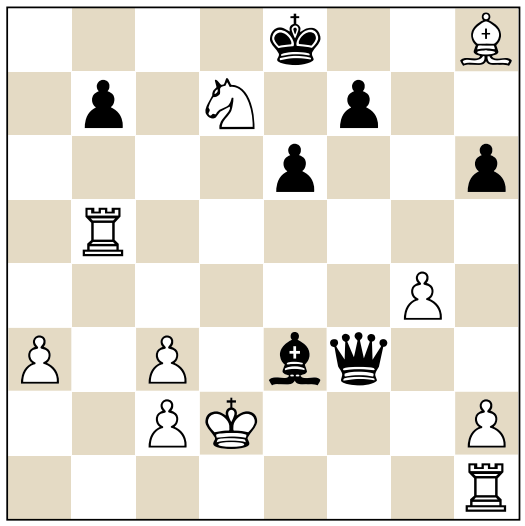
32.♔g2 and I think White should hold it – but only Black is playing for a win here, clearly, since White's kingside is somewhat soft.



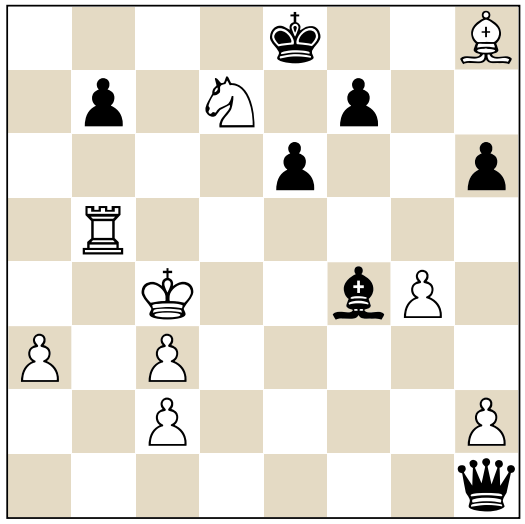
23.♖b5? Alas, returning the favour – horrible, horrible!
What was required was nerves of steel with 23.♖hf1!, when it's not clear what's going on, as White's king is not so easy to get to: 23...♕xh2+ 24.♔d3!, but it's Black who is still to be preferred after the clever 24...h5!?. And also possible was 23.♖he1!?, and now after 23...♘d7 24.♘xd7 ♕e3+ 25.♔d1 ♕xf3+ 26.♔d2 ♔xd7 27.♗d4, Black is the one trying, but White is hanging on. At least he is fully mobilised now, and is on his way to reach some stability.
23...♘d7! A multipurpose move, White is quite lost again.



24.♘xd7 Losing by force. Offering more resistance for White was 24.♖xc5 ♘xc5 25.♘d3 ♘xd3 26.cxd3, but I am afraid that the bishop will just be lost after 26...f6.
24...♕e3+ 25.♔d1 ♕xf3+ 26.♔d2 ♗e3+!



A couple of obvious intermediate moves are a piece of cake for Ahmed.
27.♔d3 ♗f4+ 28.♔c4 ♕xh1



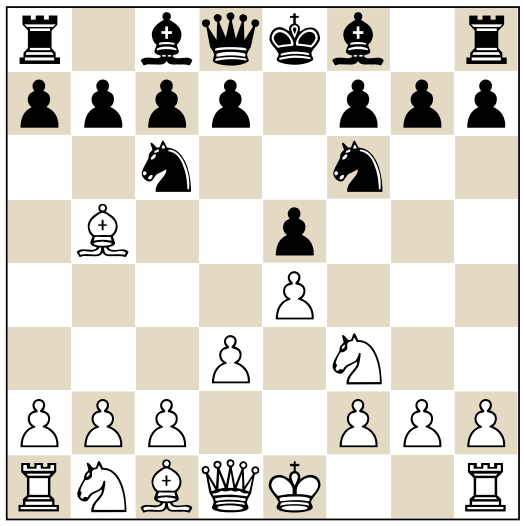
And once again, it's not even so much the material but White's lack of coordination that defines his misery. White resigned. As we have seen, the failure of Richard in this game is not to blamed on his approach, but it's rather the quality of his play – so you can easily imagine that when he's in shape, the young and hungry Hungarian can be a headache to any opponent.

Yu Yangyi

A prominent representative of the young Chinese chess empire is Yu Yangyi. With a razor-sharp opening repertoire, the confident and principled youngster has made a name for himself and has entered the elite by becoming a top-scorer on the famous Chinese national team. At the Qatar Open last December, where yours truly was leading (for a change), he raised a revolution at the end, first by beating moi and then by inflicting a painful loss on ex-champion Vladimir Kramnik in the final round.

C65
Yu Yangyi
Vladimir Kramnik
Doha 2014

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3

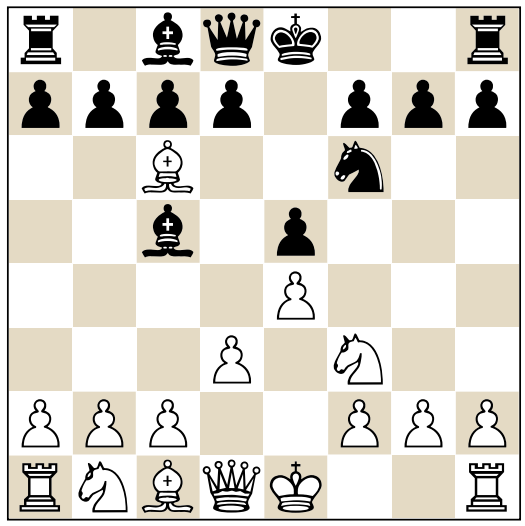


I must say I was somewhat expecting this game to end in a short draw. I had just been beaten by Yu in a very long game with Black, and he suddenly entered the stage where the real cash was being served, but

‘With a razor-sharp opening repertoire, the confident and principled youngster has made a name for himself.’

it turns out he had a different plan for himself. A draw would guarantee him a share of 2nd-3rd (apparently with me, as I was very fortunate to win my final game in that tournament, following two losses from both combatants of this game...).

4...♗c5 5.♗xc6



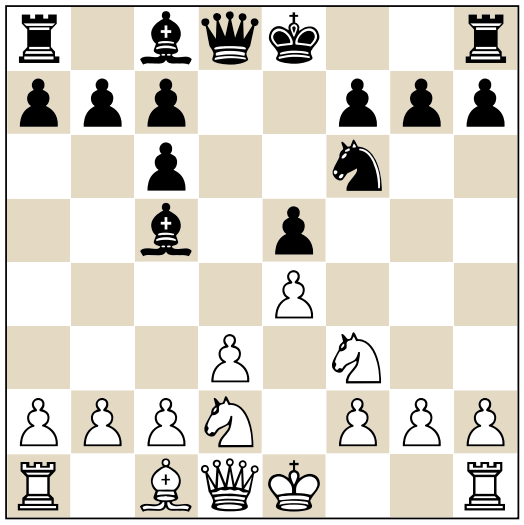
Yu Yangyi
Born: June 8, 1994
Country: China
Rating (August 1, 2015): 2726

Remarkable:
Won the first Qatar Masters Open in 2014 and the 2015 Capablanca Memorial in Havana.

This is a good variation if you want to avoid any long theoretical lines that are written in Kramnik's files, all worked out to the umpteenth decimal point. But even here, Kramnik has had quite a lot of experience, and he usually knows where to put his pieces in this structure.

5...dxc6 6.♘bd2

From some point in time people started playing this move more often than castling. I believe Kramnik and Anand understood why, but the rest just followed.



6...♗e6

The other set-up with 6...0-0 is the old-fashioned way of playing. But here Kramnik has had a lot of games, wins and losses: 7.♘c4 ♘d7 8.0-0 ♖e8 and now White has a wide range of plans, while Black usually is trying to transfer the knight to e6 or g6 via f8.

7.0-0 ♘d7

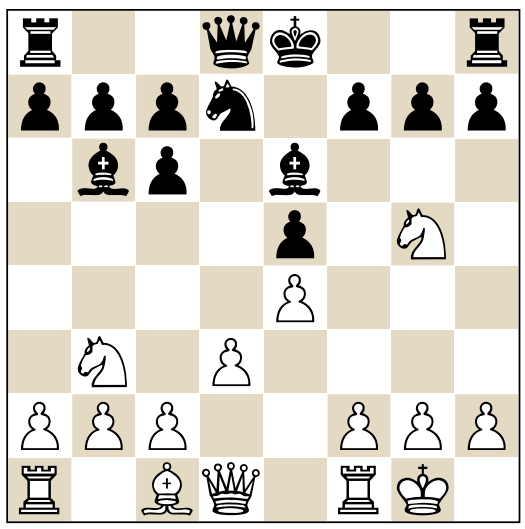
Another popular set-up is 7...♗d6 though after 8.b3 ♘d7 9.♘c4 ♗xc4 10.bxc4, I have had a pretty dull game with Michael Adams, with me having the black pieces, which later finished in a draw.

8.♘b3 ♗b6

Just days after this game was played, Yu Yangyi-Ni Hua, a Chinese league encounter, witnessed 8...♗e7 9.d4 and Black keeps the bishop pair for now, but White has some initiative in the centre.

9.♘g5

Now Black has to cede the bishop pair, but perhaps this in itself doesn't promise White all that much.



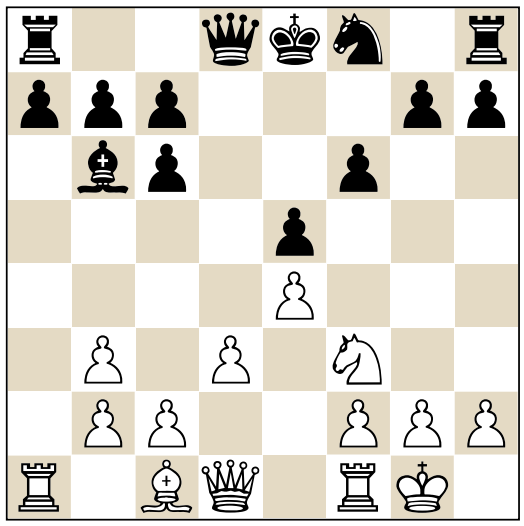
9...♗xb3!?

A creative way of solving the crisis. It improves White's pawn structure on one hand by bringing the a-pawn closer to the centre, but it makes it slightly less mobile on the other.

10.axb3 f6 11.♘f3 ♘f8

Yu Yangyi is one of the pillars of the highly successful Chinese national team.

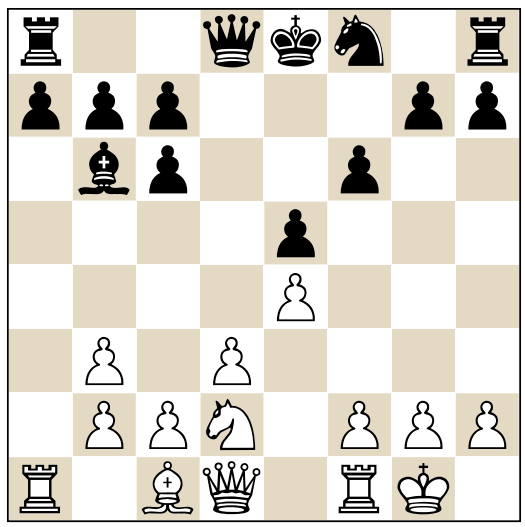
The knight in this structure usually belongs on e6.



12.♘d2!?

A new move! Kevin Spraggett chose another route for the knight, in his game against Laurent Fressinet, but I agree with Yu Yangyi here.

In that game, after 12.♘h4 ♕d7 13.g3 ♘e6 14.♔g2 0-0-0!? was a nice set-up by Fressinet. Later he played ...♔b8, ...a6, ...♔a7 and was really rock-solid, while his initiative on the kingside slowly developed.

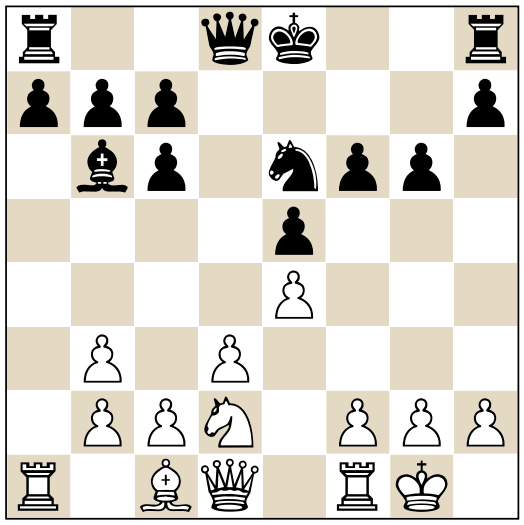


12...♘e6 Allowing ♕h5+, but I don't really think a big guy like Vladimir Kramnik cares.

A little more sophisticated, however, was 12...♕d7!? ready to meet 13.♕h5+ with 13...♕f7.

13.♕h5+!? g6 14.♕d1!?

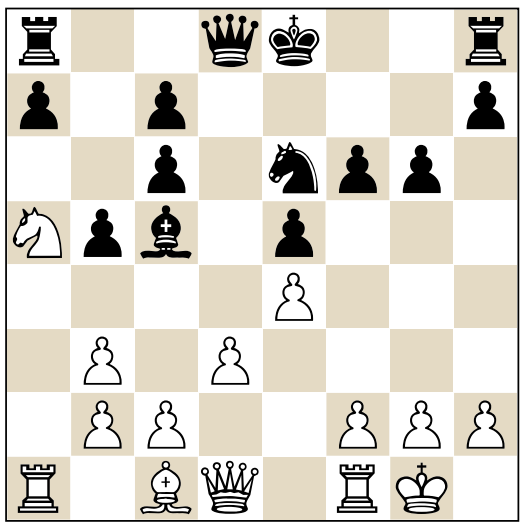
I am not sure whether it was worth two tempi to soften Black up on the kingside, but on the other hand, the position is not so much about the tempi as about the pawn structure.



14...♗c5 The exchange of the bishop for knight would not be the end of the world, but Kramnik decides against it.

15.♘c4 b5!? Very committal, but on the other hand, if Black will ever be able to play …c6-c5, his pawn structure will uncrumble. The alternative was 15...♕d7.

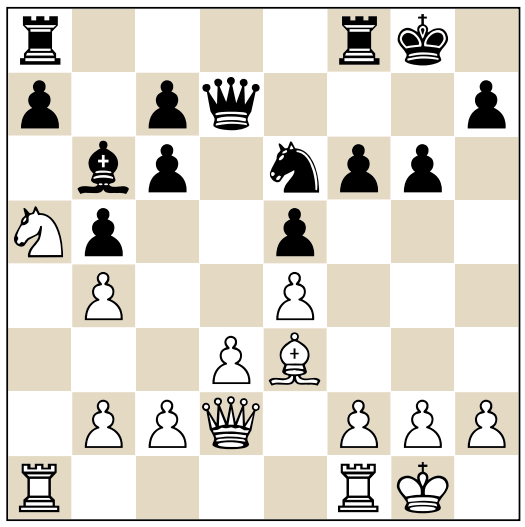
16.♘a5



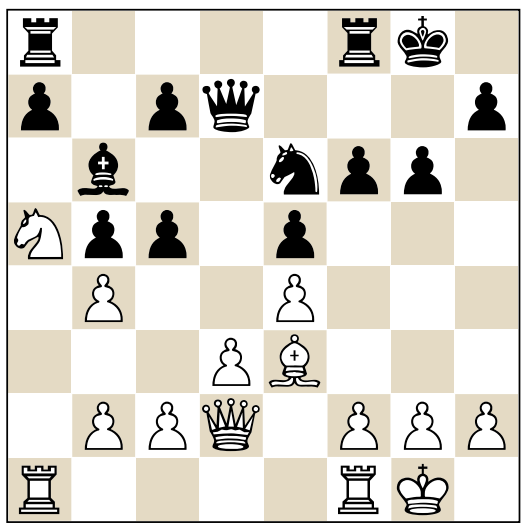
The most principled. The knight is comfortable here, and often will find the way back into the centre via b3, after White has been able to push b4.

16...♕d7 17.♗e3 ♗b6 18.b4 0-0 19.♕d2 More to the point would have been to stop …c5 and allow …f5, but this move worked out perfectly in the game.

The alternative 19.♘b3!? would allow 19...f5 20.exf5 gxf5, but this is not the end of the world and, in fact, it seems that Black is still struggling as it's not clear how to proceed after 21.♖e1 ♕d6 22.♕e2 ♖ae8 23.c3 where Black's position is more weak than threatening.

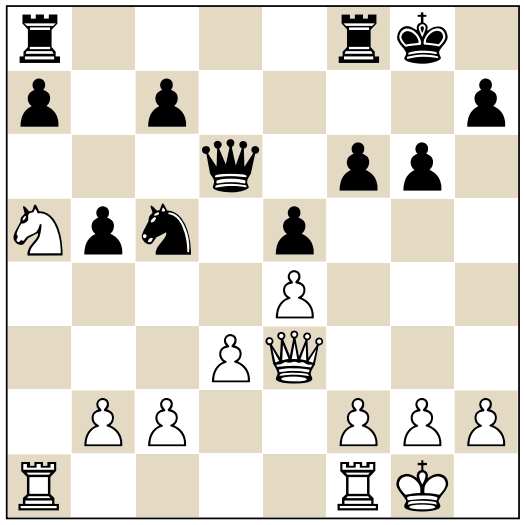


19...f5? Overambitious, a miscalculation, or perhaps more likely Kramnik simply missed the move 21.♕c3!. Instead, 19...c5! seems to be solving all the problems. It is also very natural and simple.



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

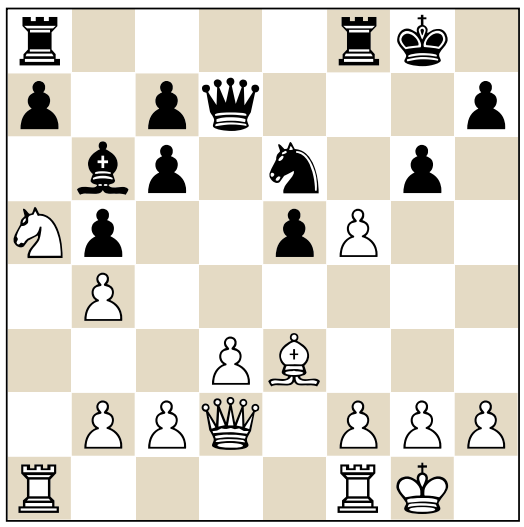
20.bxc5 ♗xc5 and here I still feel that White has slightly the more pleasant position, but I am not really able to prove it: 21.♗xc5 (21.b4 ♗xe3 22.♕xe3 ♖fc8 23.♘b3 ♕e7 is fine for Black, with the second …c5 push coming on the horizon) 21...♘xc5 22.♕e3 ♕d6



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

and Black is doing perfectly fine. He has got rid of most of his weaknesses on the queenside, and soon he might even be preparing another …c5 push.

20.exf5

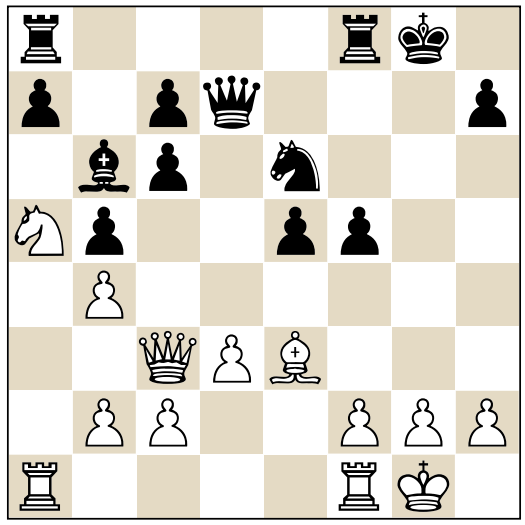


20...gxf5?! This was, of course, part of the plan. But it was still required to admit a mistake.

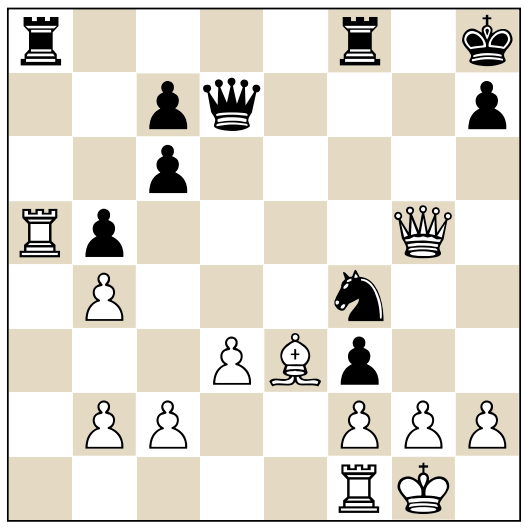
20...♖xf5 21.♘b3 is positionally clearly better for White, but the game has just started.

21.♕c3!

This requires some calculation, but that is hardly an obstacle for Yu.



21...f4 Nothing works for Black. 21...♗xa5 22.♖xa5 f4 looks tempting, but on closer inspection, White remains on top: 23.♗xa7 f3 (after 23...♘d4 24.♗xd4 exd4 25.♕c5 ♖ae8 26.♕g5+ ♔h8 27.♖aa1 f3 28.♖fe1 the f3-pawn is doing nothing – the Black king is much weaker, and ...♖g8 will be met with a check on f6) 24.♕xe5 ♘f4 25.♕g5+ ♔h8 26.♗e3!



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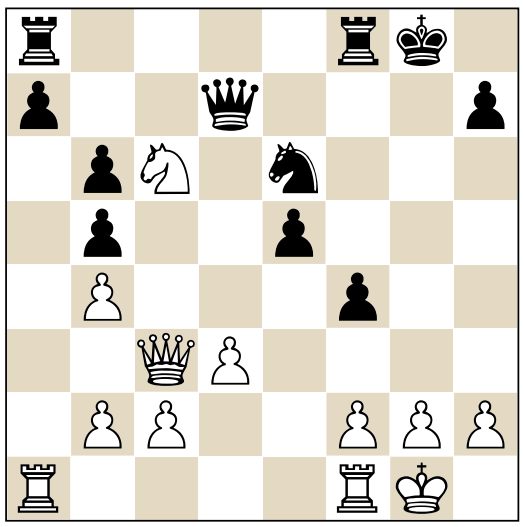
and once again, Black's king is even weaker; and that means that all the tactics don't work.

22.♗xb6 cxb6 23.♘xc6

It takes some guts to start calculating this – but once you do start, it turns out that all tactics, once again, work out for White.

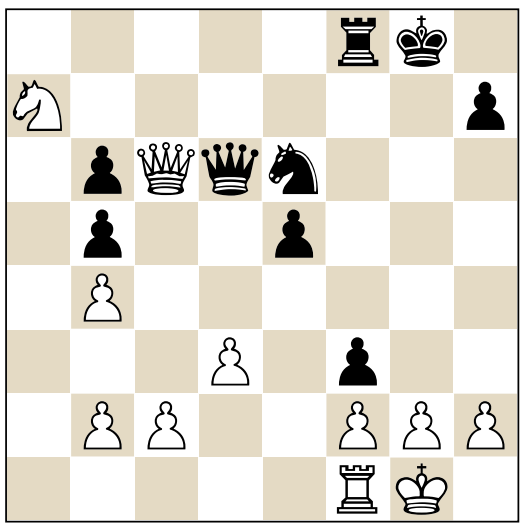


23...♕d6?!

Kramnik is trying to retain some chances. This might scare someone, but not a Chinese player. Tempting, though, was 23...♖ac8, but after a couple of precise moves of 24.♘xe5! ♕g7 25.♕b3! ♕xe5 26.♖fe1, White remains with extra pawns.

And 23...♘d4 24.♘xd4 exd4 25.♕d2 ♖f6 was the best of the worst, but here Black is simply a pawn down. Still, this would have continued the resistance.

24.♖xa7 ♖xa7 25.♘xa7 f3 26.♕c6!



The strongest continuation, as the knight actually contributes from a7.

26...♕e7 27.♘xb5

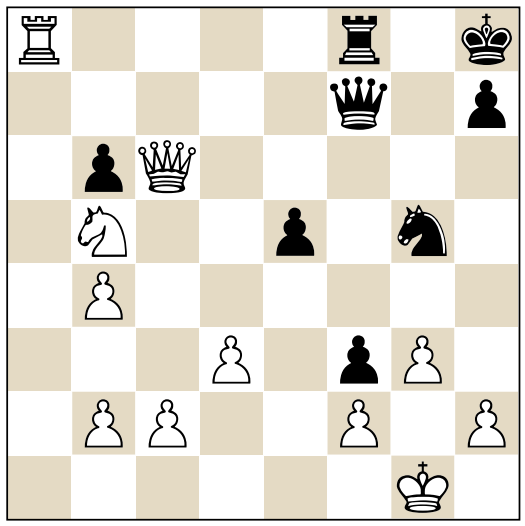
The pawn on f3 is threatening, but Black has no resources to back it up with.

27...♔h8 28.g3

There's no need to fear, as the queen is not able to reach h3 from e7.

28...♕f7 29.♖a1 ♘g5 30.♖a8

Exchanging the last pieces. Now White is simply two pawns up and there no longer can be any confusion as to the outcome of the game.



30...♕e7 31.h4 ♘h3+ 32.♔f1 e4 33.♕xe4

Black resigned. This win allowed Yu to go on to victory in the strong 2014 Qatar Open, which I am sure will quickly be left in the shadows as he moves on to bigger goals.

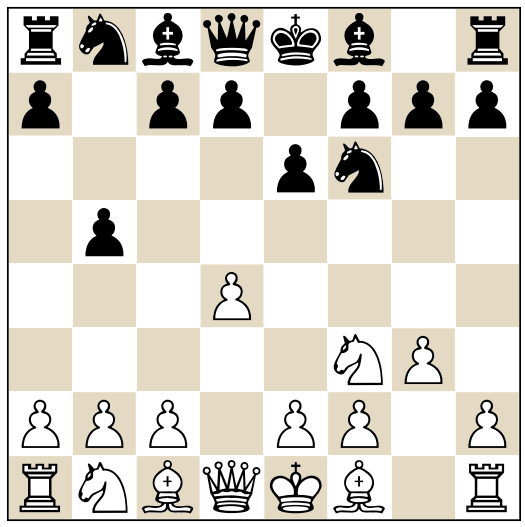
Wesley So

One of the most mysterious prodigies amongst the world top is the Filipino-American, Wesley So. Supported by a large fan-base, Wesley has always been a good candidate to challenge the very best, but for a long time he seemed to be stuck at a level around 2600. Whatever his problems were, he got rid of them; although speaking of problems, he still has got some to resolve. In his first U.S. Championship there was a lot of fuss about Wesley's complicated family situation, and the outburst came when Wesley got forfeited for breaking the rules of chess by writing encouraging, self-motivational notes to himself during a game. The steady hand with which he went on to win the game that followed that unfortunate forfeit – that for many, could well have been psychologically scarring – against the world-class player Gata Kamsky, deserves our admiration.

'Supported by a large fan-base, Wesley has always been a good candidate to challenge the very best'

A46
Gata Kamsky
Wesley So
St. Louis 2015

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.g3 b5!?
The most critical response against those who 'forget' to put the pawn on c4.

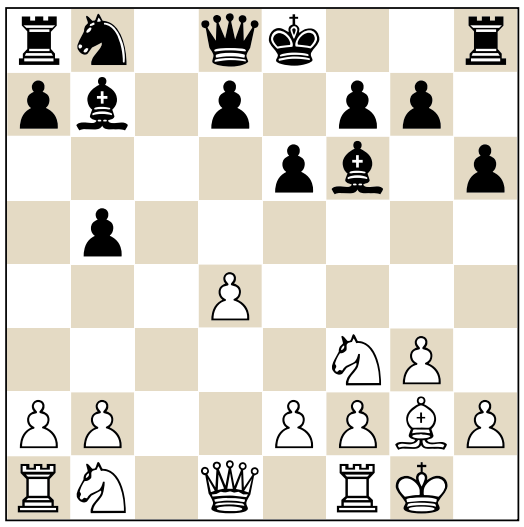


4.♗g5!?
Kamsky is always happy to get away from opening theory, so this move can hardly be surprising.
4...c5
Clever, both players are trying to come up with original moves. Hardly anything can be said against the simple developing move of 4...♗b7.
5.♗g2
More in the spirt of the position would have been 5.e3!?
5...♗b7 6.c3 cxd4 7.cxd4 ♗e7 8.0-0 h6 9.♗xf6 ♗xf6
Black has gained the bishop pair, but it is hardly of any real value at the moment. The position is pretty balanced, not much can be said about

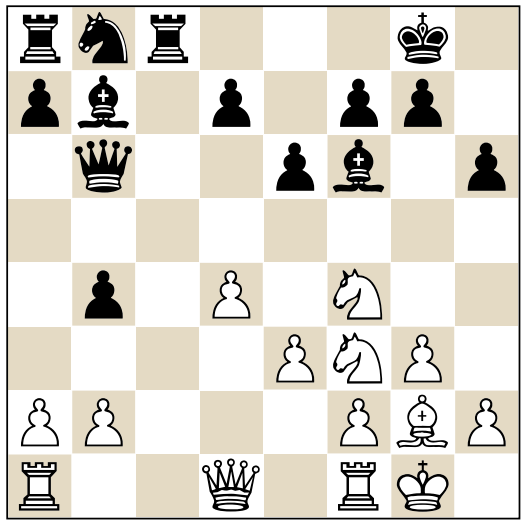
Wesley So
Born: October 9, 1993
Country: United States
Rating (August 1, 2015): 2779

Remarkable:
Having won the first Millionaire Chess in Las Vegas (and already rated 2755) he decided to become a professional chess player.

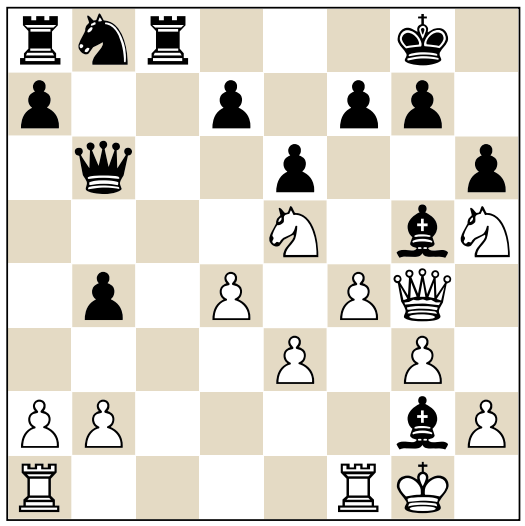
it just yet. Ideally, White would like to use the fact that the pawn on b5 is somewhat vulnerable.



10.e3 0-0 11.♘c3!?
The start of the knight's long journey across the board.
11...b4 12.♘e2 ♕b6 13.♘f4 ♖c8!? Personally I would be hesitant to delay the development of the queenside knight for too long, but perhaps Wesley didn't want to allow the possibility of 14. d5!? after 13...♘c6, and on a6 it doesn't really look appealing. Keeping that in mind, I would consider developing the knight to d7, by first advancing the d-pawn, either one or two squares.



14.♘h5! ♗e7 15.♘e5!
With two natural energetic moves, Kamsky seizes the initiative. I expected Wesley to panic slightly here, but he remained calm.
15...♗xg2 16.♕g4 ♗g5!
Well, one does have to protect against the threat of mate.
17.♔xg2
Incredible as it may seem, but there's also the somewhat seductive fantasy option of 17.f4!?.



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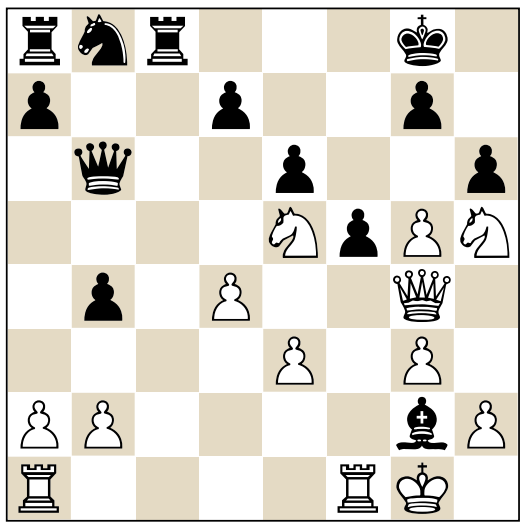
But it is probably one of those moves that you would rather play during the post-mortem session – or, indeed, analyse with your choice of playing engine – rather than have in

Wesley So is one of the most mysterious prodigies amongst the world top.

your own game, unless your name happens to be Ivanchuk, Jobava or Shirov. Now after 17...f5, should White resign now? No! 18.fxg5!!



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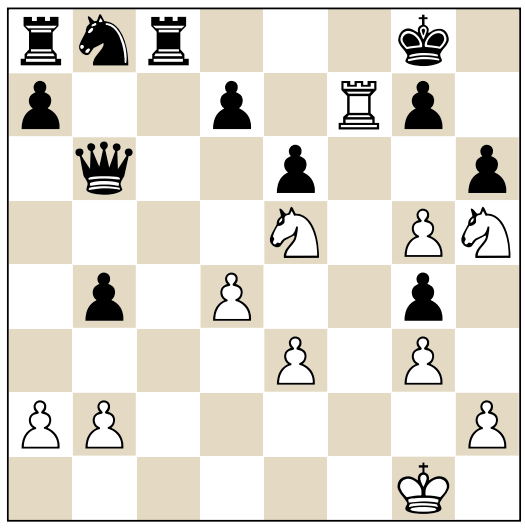
18...♗xf1 (if 18...fxg4 19.♖f7 allows White at least a perpetual) 19.♕f4! and White is a rook down, but I would like to see how many grandmasters would be thrilled about this position as Black. (The perpetual idea mentioned earlier is now no longer an option: 19.♖xf1? fxg4 20.♖f7



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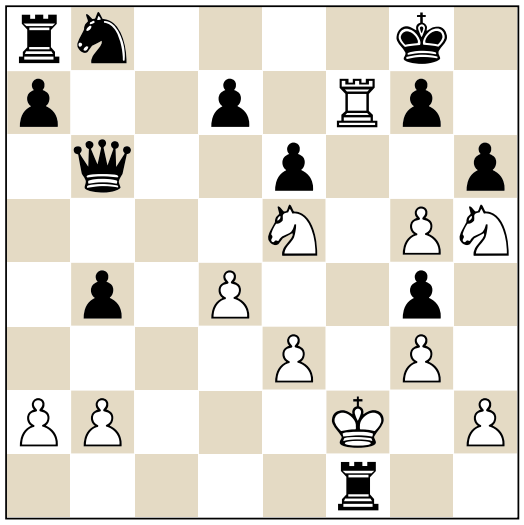
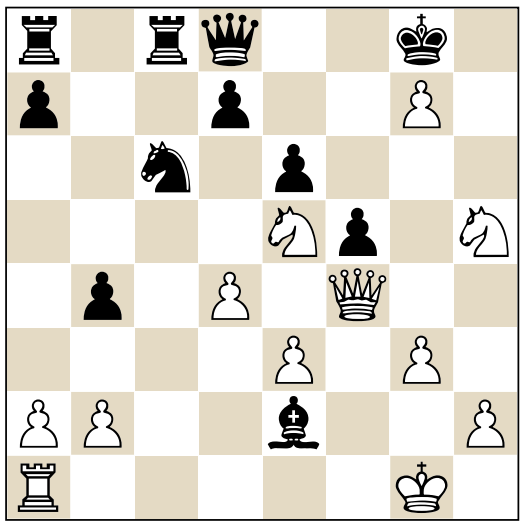
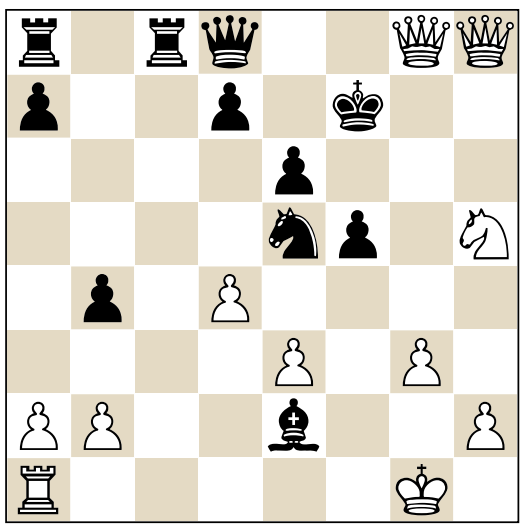
looks suspiciously like the previous perpetual note we mentioned – but fortunately there is a limit to miracles, even in chess. 20...♖c1+ 21.♔f2 ♖f1+!!



22.♔xf1 ♕b5+ 23.♔f2 ♕xe5! and it's curtains) 19...♕d8. This is one of those remarkable computer lines that online kibitzers gleefully point out while sitting back in the comfort from their own home: 20.gxh6 ♗e2! 21.hxg7 ♘c6!



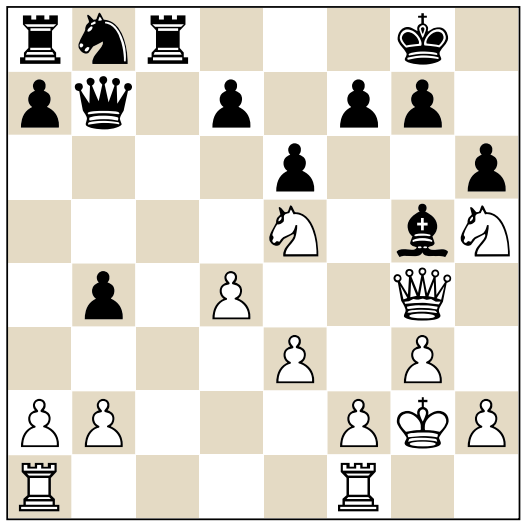
22.♕h6 ♘xe5 23.♕h8+ ♔f7 24.g8♕+!



24...♕xg8 25.♕f6+ ♔e8 26.♘g7+ ♕xg7 27.♕xg7 ♘f7 and it's time to evaluate the position. I say unclear, what say you?

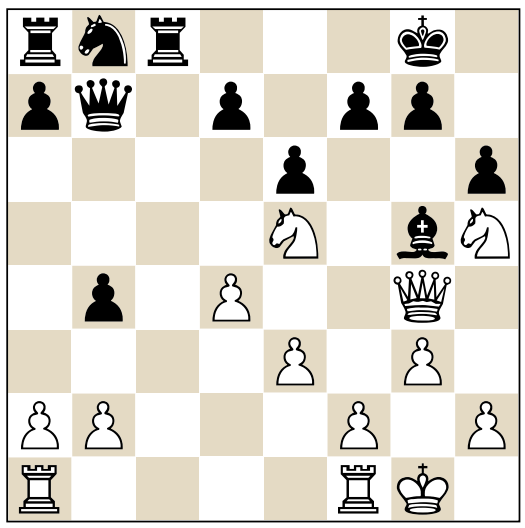
17...♕b7+!

Taking control of the long diagonal.



18.♔g1

From this point onwards, White starts playing strictly for a win. An understandable decision, considering how lonely the king on g8 looks, but Black's defensive resources shouldn't have been underestimated. The safe option was 18.♕f3 ♕xf3+ 19.♘xf3 leading to a quiet endgame where Kamsky would surely not lose; but then again, not likely to win either.

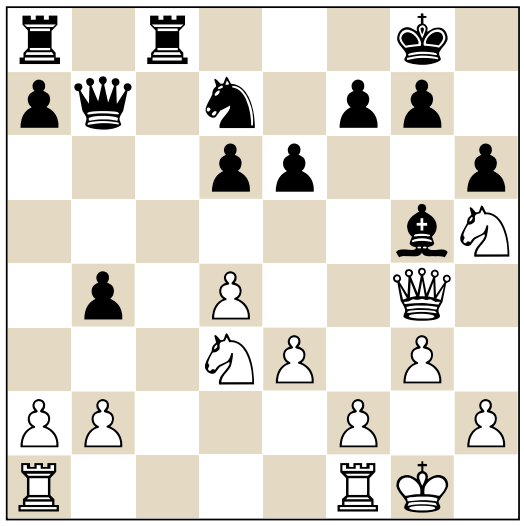


18...d6! 19.♘d3

Tempting was 19.h4 but after 19...f5! White has nothing better than heading for an equal endgame with 20.♕f3!.
Also 19.f4 is well met here with 19...f5!.

19...♘d7!

The knight finally comes into the game – and just in time to shore up the defences!



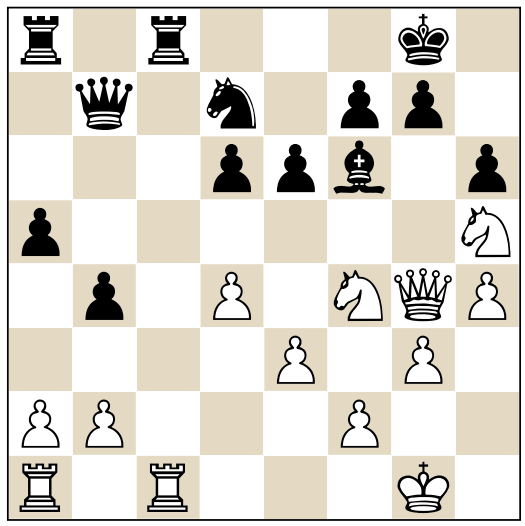
20.h4 ♗f6 And now what? It appears that White should still have some sort of initiative here, but it is nothing more than an illusion. From here onwards Kamsky should have adjusted to the new situation. But uncharacteristically, he instead starts to lose the plot.
For those wondering, the natural-looking 20...♘f6? fails to 21.♕e2 ♘xh5 22.hxg5! and the knight on the rim is not only dim but also lost!

21.♖fc1

More sensible was the option of putting the other rook here with 21.♖ac1 a5 22.♖fd1, but the difference is too subtle.

21...a5 22.♘df4?

It is hard to imagine it, but soon the h5-knight will be in trouble. White had to switch to playing 'normal chess' now and forget about the mirage of wild attacks he was thinking of directing towards the Black kingside.
Instead, the reality was that Kamsky had to play either 22.e4!? or 22.♘hf4!? maintaining an equal position; though I must say that Black is comfortable here.



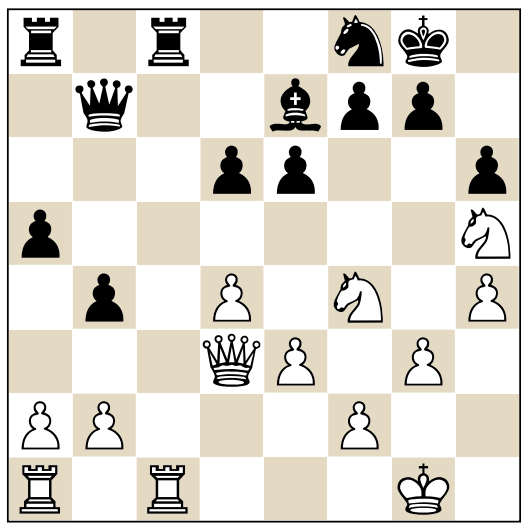
22...♕e4! Now with one very accurate move, 'suddenly' the f4-knight is pinned and White has no tactical ideas whatsoever.

23.♕e2 ♗e7!

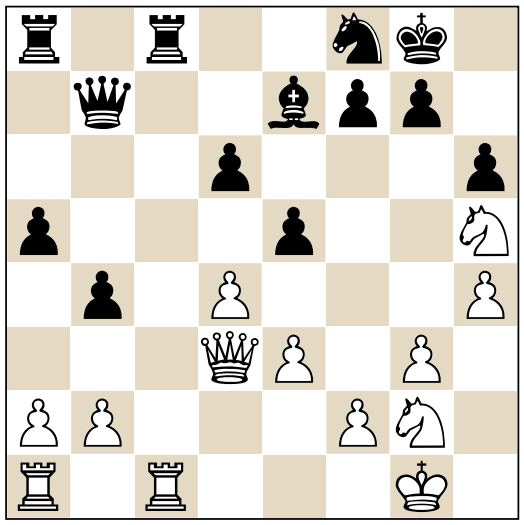
Hang on, isn't the h5-knight suddenly trapped?!

24.♕b5 ♘f8 25.♕d3 ♕b7!

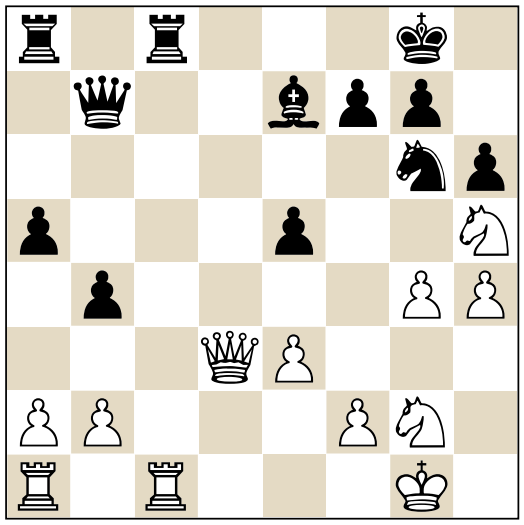
Cool. Very cool. So holds the long diagonal – and yes, my friends, the knight is still trapped.



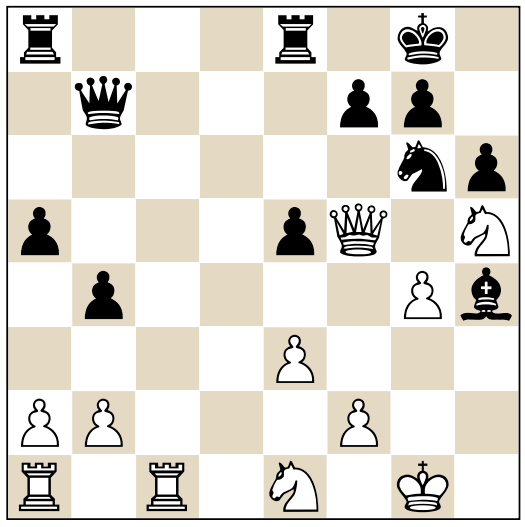
26.♘g2 e5! It's amazing, isn't it, how in just a few moves the pendulum has drastically switched in Black's favour? From having no worries and the prospects of a very tempting kingside attack, White basically now has a lost position. I'm afraid 22.♘df4? was a bigger mistake than one could possible imagine.



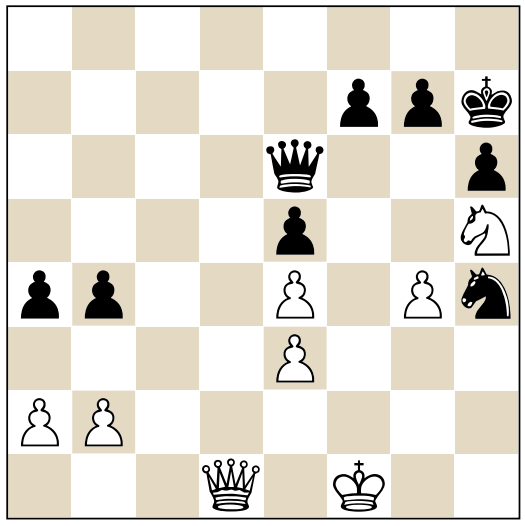
27.dxe5 dxe5 28.g4 ♘g6
The rest is just 'cashing in'.



29.♕f5 Even now, Kamsky could have bailed out with 29.♘g3! finally getting the knight back in the game, but with Black in control and a full pawn up after 29...♗xh4.
29...♗xh4 30.♘e1 ♖e8 Black is a solid pawn up and has the better position. There are many ways here to finish the game, and So remains firmly in control throughout.



31.♖d1 ♖ad8 32.♘g2 ♕b5 33.♖xd8 ♖xd8 34.♕c2 ♕d5 35.♕e2 ♕d2 36.♔f1 a4 37.♘e1 ♕d5 38.e4 ♕e6 39.♘c2 ♗g5 40.♘e3 ♗xe3 41.fxe3 ♘h4 42.♖d1 ♖xd1+ 43.♕xd1 ♔h7!?
It's a bit humiliating now, really.



44.b3 axb3 45.axb3 g6 46.♘g3 h5 47.♕d5 ♕f6+ 48.♔e2 hxg4 49.♔d3 ♘g2 50.♕b7 ♔g7 51.♕b5 ♘xe3! 52.♘e2 ♘f1 53.♔c4 ♕d6 54.♕xb4 ♘d2+ 55.♔c3 ♘b1+ 56.♔c4 ♕a6+
White resigned.
A peculiar guy, this Wesley So.

Ding Liren

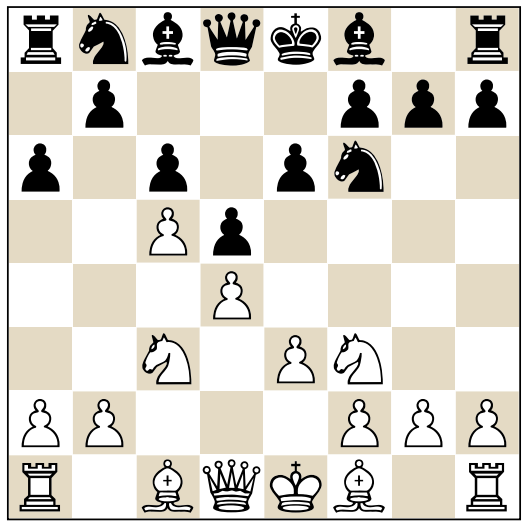
One formidable force amongst the new generation of Chinese players is Ding Liren. Having some inside knowledge, I know quite a lot about many Chinese grandmasters, and Ding Liren is definitely one of the most talented and hardworking ones. He is slowly expanding his narrow opening repertoire, and with the white pieces he has always been quite deadly. An interesting understanding of chess, combined with deep and patient calculation, makes him a very strong player – and his fighting spirit always guarantees him some extra points here and there. Yet I was surprised to hear the rumour that he has been working with Magnus Carlsen, but we will surely know more about this when the time comes.

D45
Ding Liren
Levon Aronian
Paris 2013

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 a6 5.e3 e6

Levon has a very broad opening repertoire, and back in 2013 he employed this system from time to time. I don't know how he came up with it, as it's way too depressing for his enterprising style.

6.c5 One of the critical moves, but I believe both 6.♕c2 and 6.b3 pose problems for Black, although Vishy Anand managed to hold the fort in these variations during his 2012 match against Gelfand.



6...♘bd7 Now Black has two available plans to free himself from the bind: one is to go ...b6 and another is to prepare ...e6-e5, usually starting with ...g6!? and ...♗g7.

The simplest is 6...b6 and after 7.cxb6 ♕xb6, Black is doing alright in the long run, but the question remains if he will actually manage to free himself, develop the c8-bishop

'An interesting understanding of chess, combined with deep and patient calculation, makes him a very strong player.'

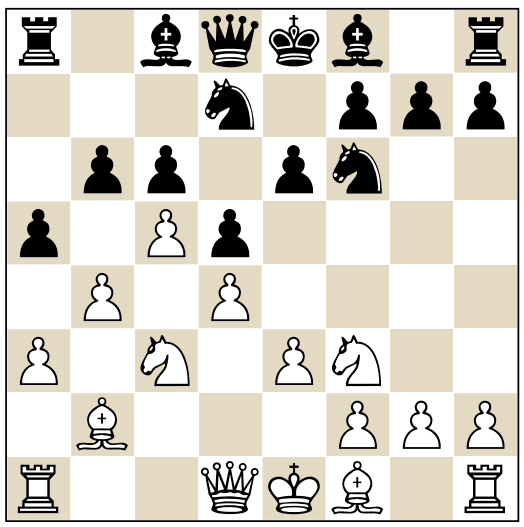
Ding Liren
Born: October 24, 1992
Country: China
Rating (August 1, 2015): 2770

Remarkable:
At the age of 16, he became the youngest winner ever of the Chinese Championship. His second and third national title he won in 2011 and 2012.

and/or get the ...c6-c5 break in time. In a recent game Kasimdzhanov-Andreikin, Black solved his problems rather easily, but it is not enough to form any conclusions.

7.b4 b6 And the other plan I mentioned here is 7...g6!?.

8.♗b2 a5 9.a3

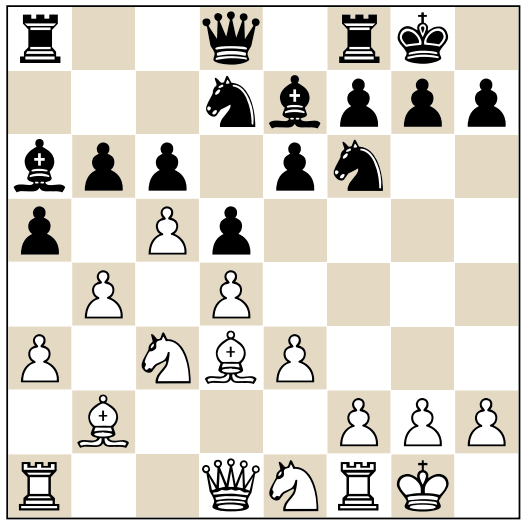


This is a standard pawn-structure, arising from the popular variation of the QGD with 5.♗f4 ♘bd7 5.c5 c6, but also from some variations of the Nimzo, and recently Levon managed to get this pawn-structure against Etienne Bacrot from the Ragozin Defence. Sometimes Levon really surprises me with his opening choices, but OK, everyone has a weakness for some sort of crappy pawn-structure.

9...♗e7 10.♗d3 0-0 11.0-0 ♗a6 12.♘e1!?

An interesting positional idea, possibly prepared beforehand by Ding. The standard response here is 12.♗xa6 ♖xa6 13.b5 cxb5 14.c6 ♘b8. This involves a positional pawn sacrifice, and it is hard to say whether it promises White anything concrete at all.

And after 12.b5, besides capturing the pawn, here Black also has a standard and very safe response with 12...♗b7!?, when the queenside pawns will be exchanged, and the position will be roughly equal.



12...♗c4?

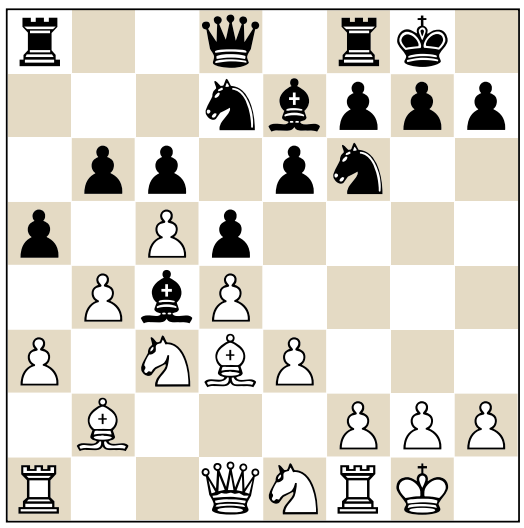
This is a very risky, positional decision, and I must say having analysed the position a little, I have to conclude it is not only risky, but also bad. However, during a game it is hard, even for a player with the understanding of Aronian, to foresee the consequences of such a complicated positional operation.

An interesting alternative is 12...e5!? that has been tried recently by

Ranked number 10 in the world, Ding Liren is the highest rated Chinese grandmaster.

former Women's World Champion Antoaneta Stefanova. And after 13.♗xa6 ♖xa6 14.b5 Black is forced to respond very energetically with 14...exd4!? – but I am sure Levon wouldn't have minded this.

The boring alternative is 12...♕c7, the one move you can always rely on here, and the one that can hardly be bad after 13.♗xa6 ♖xa6 14.♘d3 ♖fa8.

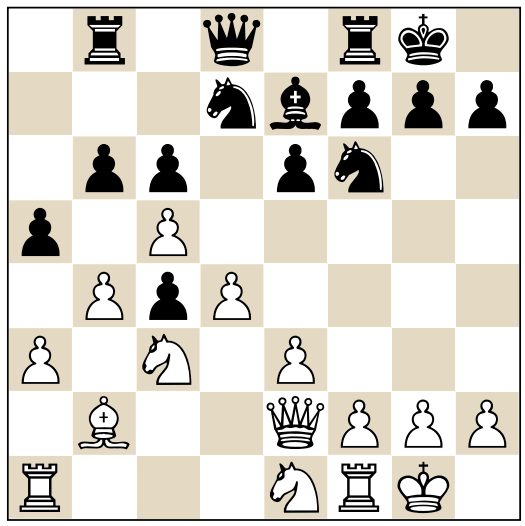


13.♗xc4! dxc4 14.♕e2!

White first wants to provoke …b5 before advancing e4.

14...♖b8 This only postpones the inevitable b5.

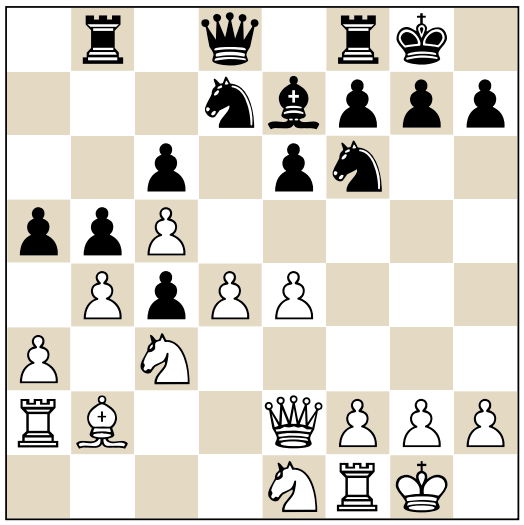
Also similar to the game would have been 14...b5 15.e4 and so is 14...♕b8 15.♖b1! b5 16.e4.



15.♖a2 Now threatening the c4-pawn, which wasn't really hang-

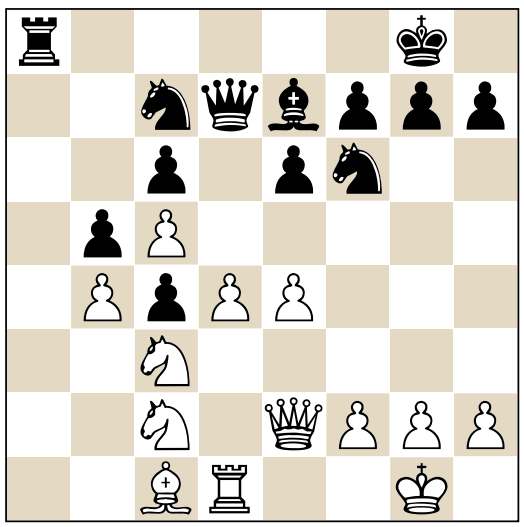
ing before, as there was an x-ray attack down the b-file hitting the bishop.
Also good too was 15.♖b1!?, serving the same purpose.

15...b5 16.e4



16...♖b7

One might well argue that Levon should have exchanged the rooks after all, but essentially it's a choice between bad and evil. But after 16...♖a8 17.♖a1 axb4 18.axb4 ♖xa1 19.♗xa1 ♘b8 20.♘c2 ♘a6 21.♖d1 ♘c7 22.♗b2 ♕d7 23.♗c1 ♖a8,



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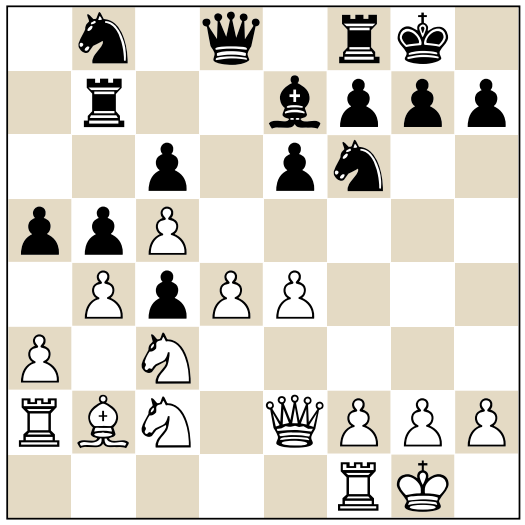
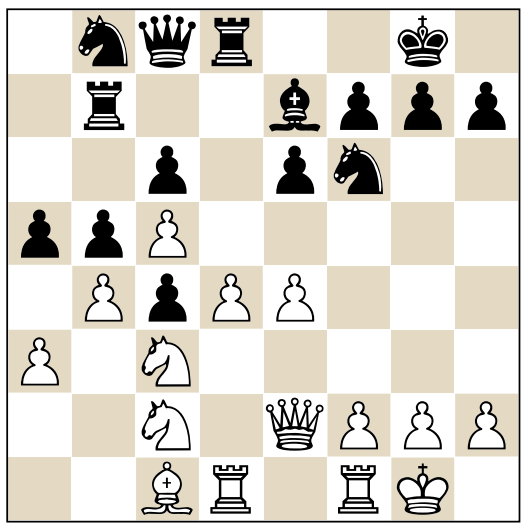
Black's position looks extremely depressing to me, but maybe it was better than the game. And after the natural 24.♗f4 ♗d8, Black can try to make a stand, but really, according to all known laws of chess, sooner or later White should be able to make a breakthrough. Hard as it is to admit it, but 12...♗c4? was nearly a decisive mistake, a strategical blunder!

17.♘c2 ♘b8



Improving the knight, but really it doesn't change the essence of the position – Black is stuck waiting for a blow to be delivered somewhere. He's got a terrible pawn structure and the c4-pawn is merely a protected passed pawn on paper. With the white knights so ideally placed on c2 and c3, Black has no counterplay in any near and any far future.

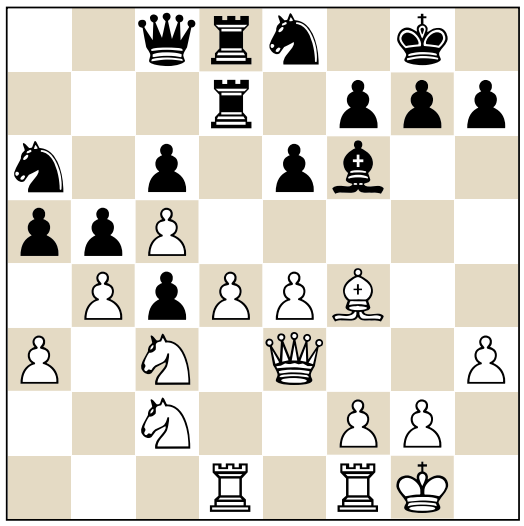
18.♖aa1 ♕c8 19.♖ad1 ♖d8 20.♗c1!



The bishop is indeed better located on f4. From here, White can slowly improve his position.

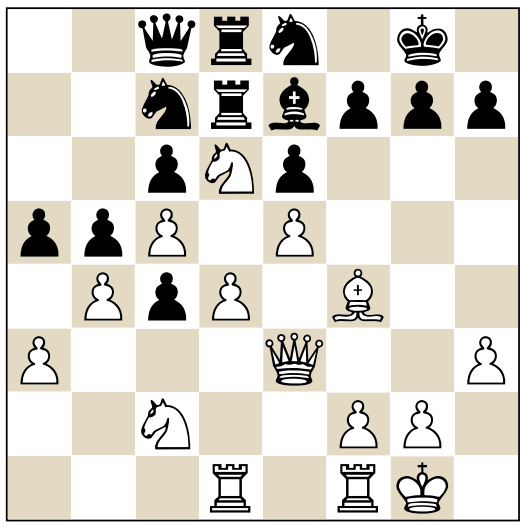
20...♘a6 21.♗f4 ♖bd7 22.h3 ♘e8 23.♕e3 ♗f6

Levon is always trying something. Now he has …e5 in mind.



24.e5!? Creating a hole on d5, but more importantly, transferring the knight to an impressive outpost on d6. A responsible decision, but a good one. Also possible was 24.♗h2, aiming to meet 24...e5 with 25.d5, which looks very good for White, and possibly some players would have opted for a slower approach, but it's really just a matter of taste here.

24...♗e7 25.♘e4 ♘ac7 26.♘d6

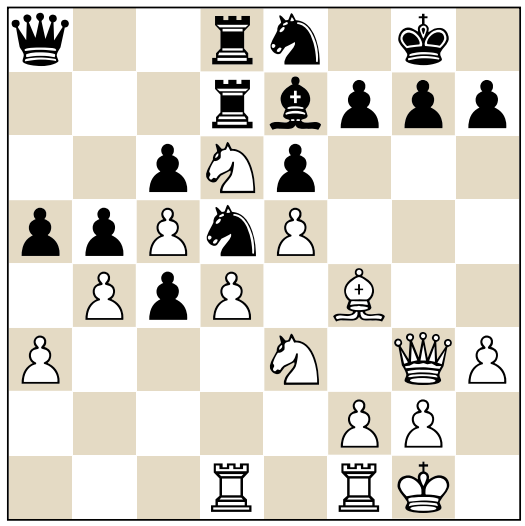


26...♕a8

It is indeed hard to tolerate the knight on d6, but exchanging it doesn't help much either. Eventually though, Black did it anyway.

27.♕g3 ♘d5 28.♘e3!

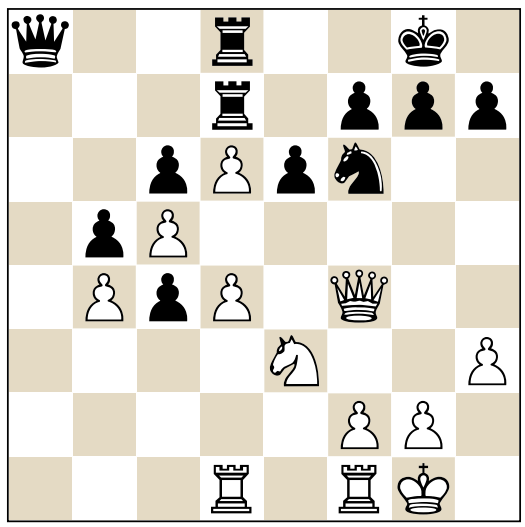
This involves some tactics, but the move feels right!



28...♘c3

Not going for some of the complications here, which are however bound to end badly.

There was also the solid option of 28...♗xd6 29.exd6 ♘xf4 30.♕xf4 axb4 31.axb4 ♘f6



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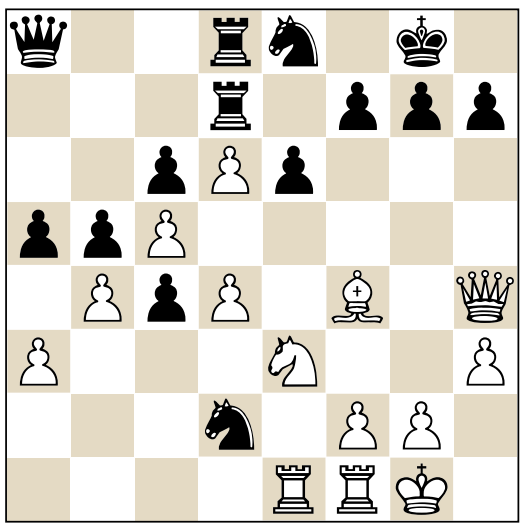
where at least Black here has limited White's attacking potential. On the other hand, the difference between the passed pawns on d6 and c4 is

what defines White's superiority here. Still, it would take a lot of work to convert this advantage to the full point.

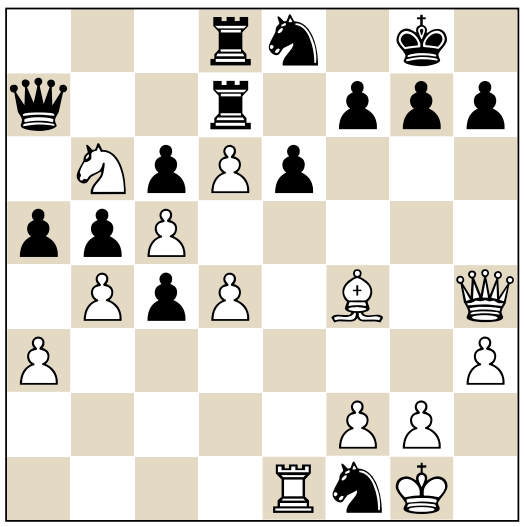
And Black has nothing to be proud of with the positional 28...♘ec7, other than one beautiful knight, as after 29.♗h6 ♗f8 30.♘g4 White is crashing the kingside.

29.♖de1 ♗xd6 30.exd6 ♘e4 31.♕h4 ♘d2

This appears to win an exchange, but appearances can be deceptive, as Ding had spotted a nice trick.

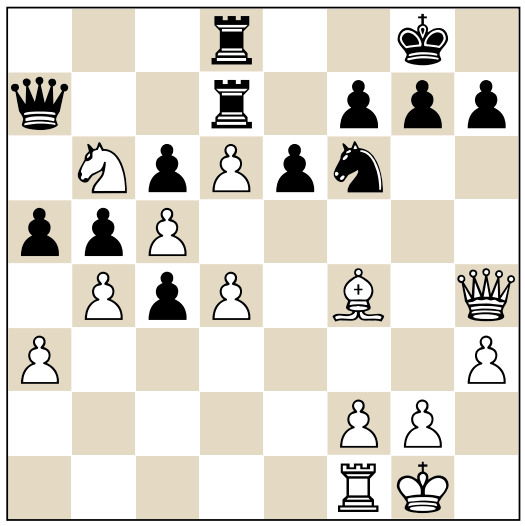


32.♘d5! ♘xf1 33.♘b6 ♕a7



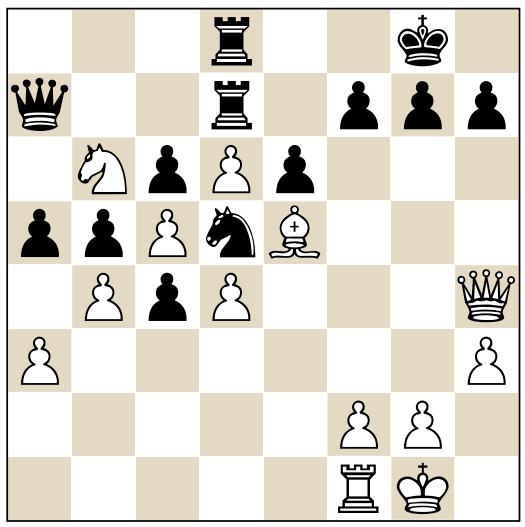
34.♖xf1 White is in no hurry to regain the exchange, since the d7-rook can't move anyway, but here I would perhaps disagree with Ding and take the knight with the king – after all, the rook on e1 was doing a good job. But essentially, it doesn't change the nature of the position – Black is so busted.

34...♘f6 The only logical attempt, to hope that Black can set up some sort of blockade and nothing will happen... BUT!



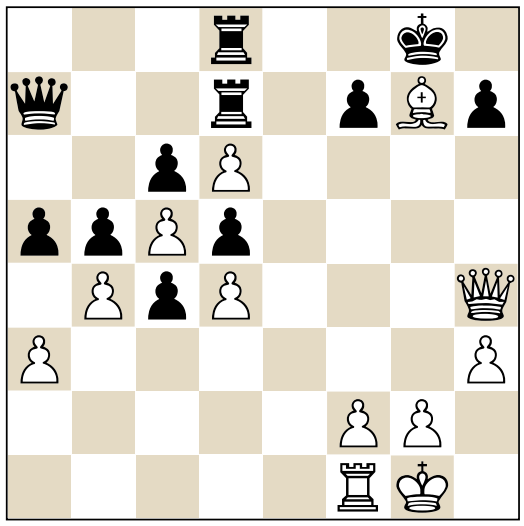
35.♗e5! Probably a rather unexpected turn of events for Levon. Suddenly, White has something to say to the black king. 35.a4!? was another way to break through, but Ding just wins by simple and rather brutal means.

35...♘d5



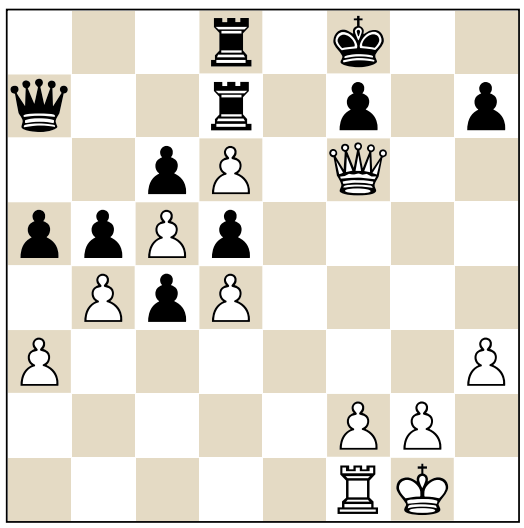
36.♘xd5! I don't need your exchange, Mr. Aronian!

36...exd5 37.♗xg7!



With the queen out of the way on a7, the king is defenceless. This combination wasn't easy to spot, but it is rather easy to calculate.

37...♔xg7 38.♕g5+ ♔f8 39.♕f6!

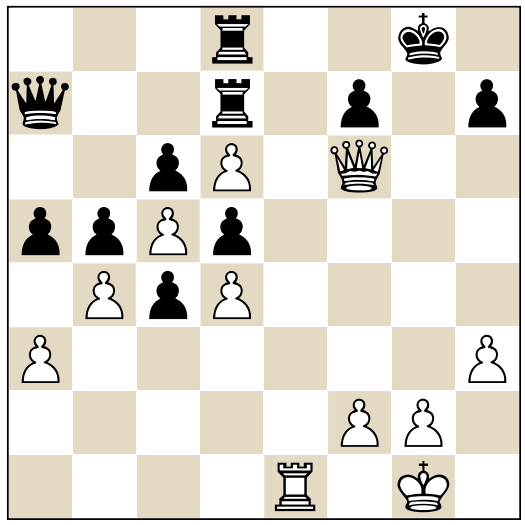


39...♔g8 The only move, as the alternative would have seen ♕h8 mate a-coming.

40.♕g5+ ♔f8 41.♕f6 Getting to the time control, so why not!

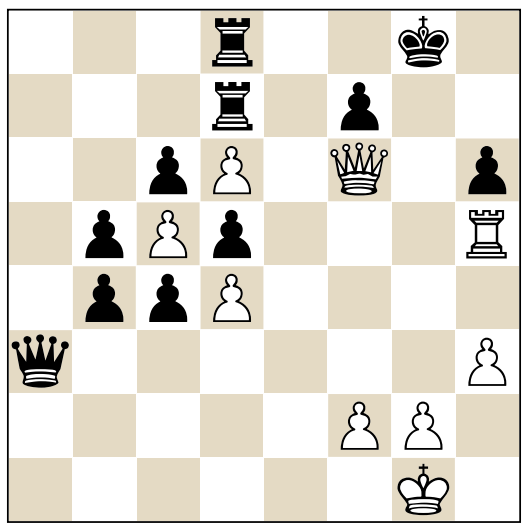
41...♔g8 42.♖e1!

Now with a lot of time on his clock, Ding has the luxury to verify his calculations. This is, by the way, a very typical trick in all those sacrifices that offer up a perpetual check. Often you can give a couple of checks first and then some other piece (here, the rook) joins the fray, clinching the point.



42...axb4 43.♖e5 The rest is a matter of simple calculation for any respectable Chinese player. They solve such stuff with cornflakes for breakfast in their dorm.

43...h6 44.♖h5 ♕xa3



45.♕xh6

While it's never late to blunder something, here Ding does have it all under control. However, there was the potential pitfall of 45.♖xh6? ♕c1+! 46.♔h2 ♕xh6!, when White has somehow managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

45...f6 46.♕xf6 Black resigned. A beautiful execution by Ding, one of the best players of our time!

Fabiano Caruana

The first player that comes to mind when talking about 'challenging' Magnus Carlsen's world domination is obviously Fabiano Caruana. Perhaps a little robotic in his appearance and approach, Fabiano constantly works on his game and refuses to give in to any emotions. Once upon a time a prodigy, he got stuck at the level slightly below 2700, only to then suddenly march to the magical 2800 barrier, winning a string of elite tournaments en route. His 'calling card' is definitely the Sinquefield Cup in Saint Louis in 2014, where he won seven (!) games in a row, an epic streak that included wins over Magnus Carlsen and almost all of the other representatives of the top-10.

'Perhaps a little robotic in his appearance and approach, Fabiano constantly works on his game and refuses to give in to any emotions.'

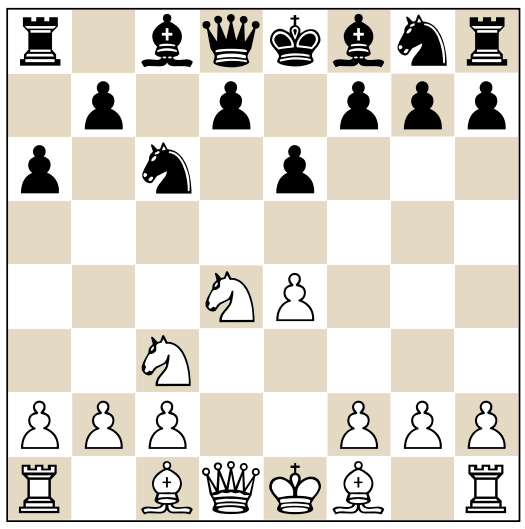
B46
Fabiano Caruana
Veselin Topalov
St. Louis 2014

1.e4 Fabiano is known for having a very strong serve, almost always starting off with the Bobby Fischer 'best by test' advance of the King's pawn.

1...c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 a6

Topalov is aiming for one of the less popular of the Sicilians, trying to avoid Fabiano's legendary preparation – but that's easier said than done.

And although 5...♕c7 avoids the structure in the game, it does though allow the dangerous English Attack, which Topalov probably feared.



6.♘xc6 The most critical line, needless to say.

6...bxc6 7.♗d3 d5

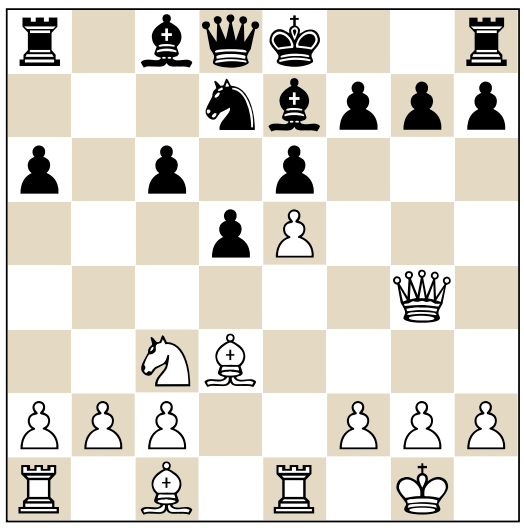
Generally in this variation, Black has a good pawn-structure thanks to his extra central pawn, but having wasted a tempo with …a7-a6, he now lags behind in development.

8.0-0 ♘f6 9.♖e1 ♗e7 10.e5

Fabiano Caruana
Born: July 30, 1992
Country: United States
Rating (August 1, 2015): 2808

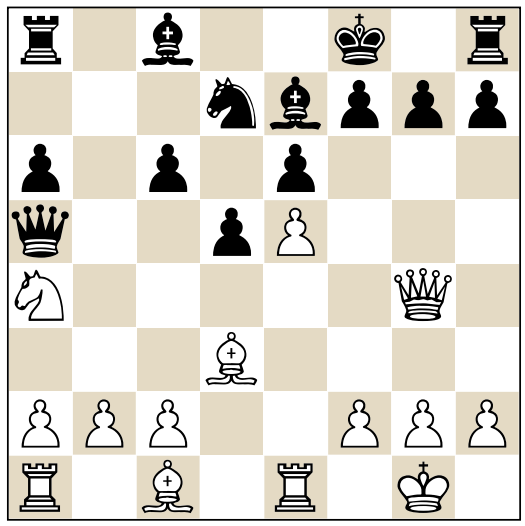
Remarkable:
At the 2014 Sinquefield Cup in St. Louis he started with a winning streak of 7 games. Three draws in the remaining games resulted in one of the most impressive tournament victories in history.

Once again, Fabiano goes for the most critical line.
10...♘d7 11.♕g4



Here, Black has to answer a good question: What to do about the g7-pawn? This position has come under scrutiny at top grandmaster level on a number of occasions now.
11...♔f8 Not unsurprisingly from Topalov, the latest trend. The position is reasonably closed, so Black players have decided that they can afford losing the right to castle. Structurally speaking, Black is doing very well with a rock-solid position.

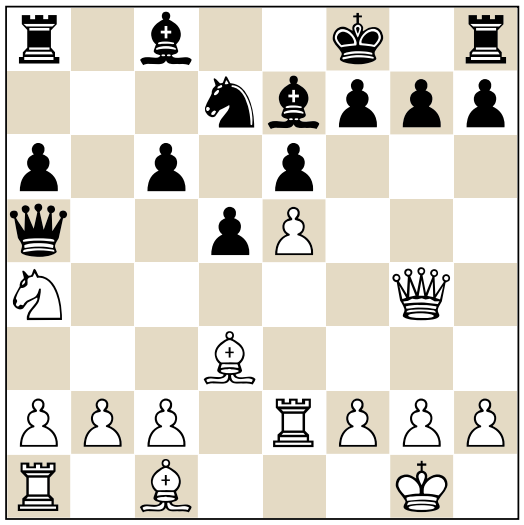
The other options are not so good. After 11...0-0? 12.♗h6 is a motif every amateur should know about. And once 11...g6 used to be the main-line, but it weakens the dark-squares – and Black will be prevented from castling also after 12.♗h6!.
12.♘a4! The idea is to challenge the d5-e6 block in the centre with the typical c4! break.
12...♕a5!? A novelty, but it turns out that Fabiano was a step ahead. Usually more common for Black here is 12...c5 13.c4 d4, but here he has to reckon with the undermining 14.b4! that leaves d4 weak.



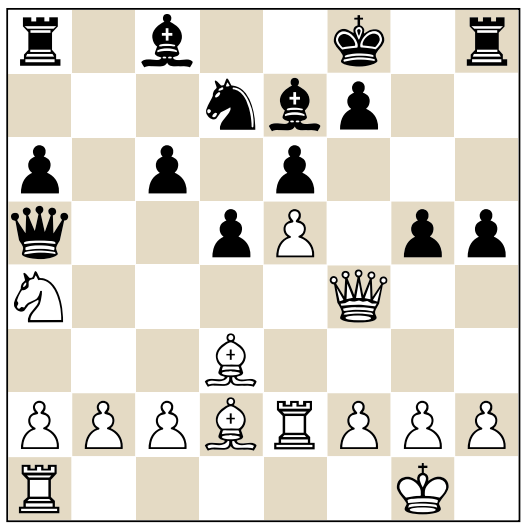
13.♖e2!
Topalov must have assumed that this move is not possible, since it appears that with ♕a5, Black not only attacked the rook on e1, but he also had another threat on the a4-knight.
The move of choice from the playing engine is 13.♗g5 – but good preparation in the modern epoch is often deeper than that. Even the strongest computers can't grasp all the nuances of the openings at the highest level in the game. After 13...♗xg5 14.♕xg5 ♗b7 (certainly not

Fabiano Caruana is known for having a very strong serve, almost always starting off with the Bobby Fischer 'best by test' advance of the King's pawn.

14...♕xa4?? as the queen was also covering the little matter of 15.♕d8 mate!) 15.b3 c5 is perfectly acceptable for Black, as he is now ready to meet 16.c4 with 16...d4!
And also, if 13.c3 h5 14.♕d1 doesn't look too threatening as Black has 14...c5 15.c4 d4 yet again.



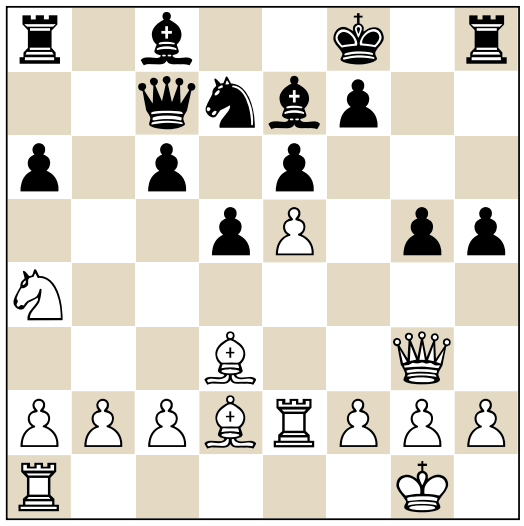
13...h5 14.♕f4 g5
It does appear as if White is losing that knight on a4, but there's the zwischenzug with...
15.♗d2!



15...♕c7?
Probably the best move here is 15...gxf4, but after 16.♗xa5 the endgame didn't really appeal to Topalov. In fact, at this point, Fabiano was leading with 5/5, and Veselin ambitiously wanted to keep the position

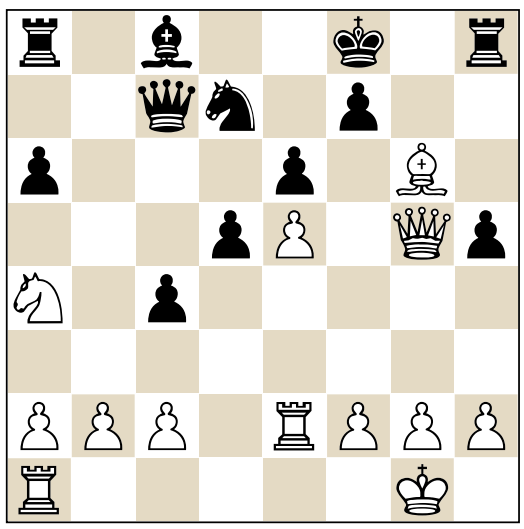
as double-edged as he could. Unfortunately for him, Fabiano was well prepared for what was to come.

16.♕g3!



Inviting the h-pawn further forward. Unclear would have been 16.♕e3?! c5 17.c3 and Black has resolved most of his difficulties; and a bonus for him now is how uncomfortable the 'knight on the rim' looks.

16...h4 While 16...c5 looks like a very clever move, Fabiano would have had the powerful reply 17.♗xg5! ♗xg5 18.♕xg5 c4 19.♗g6!!



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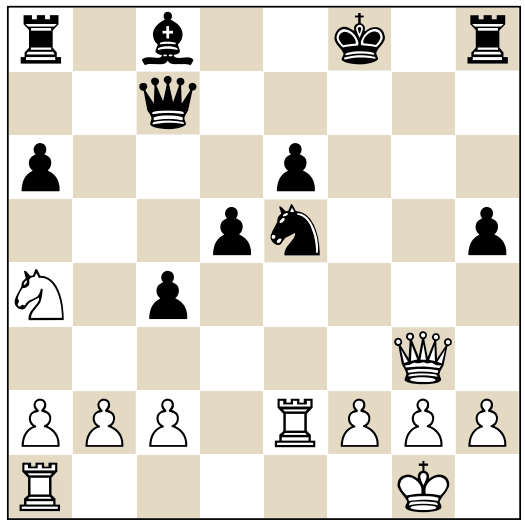
After this stunning piece sacrifice, Black's position soon collapses, for example: 19...fxg6 20.♕xg6 ♘xe5 21.♕g3!



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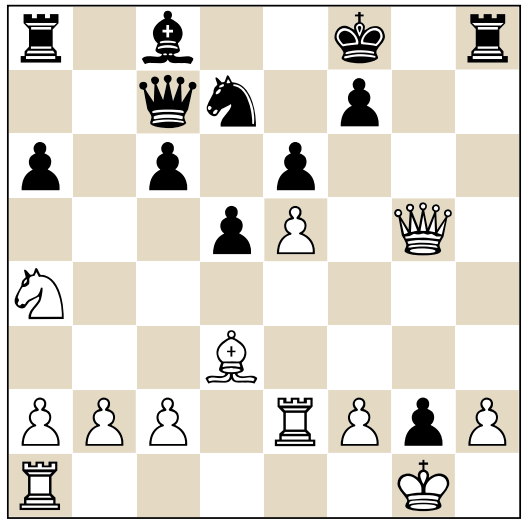
The skewer on the knight and queen will leave Black a pawn down and also with a precarious position to defend.

17.♕g4 ♖g8

Also tempting was 17...h3, but White can play simple chess here with 18.♗xg5 ♗xg5 19.♕xg5 hxg2



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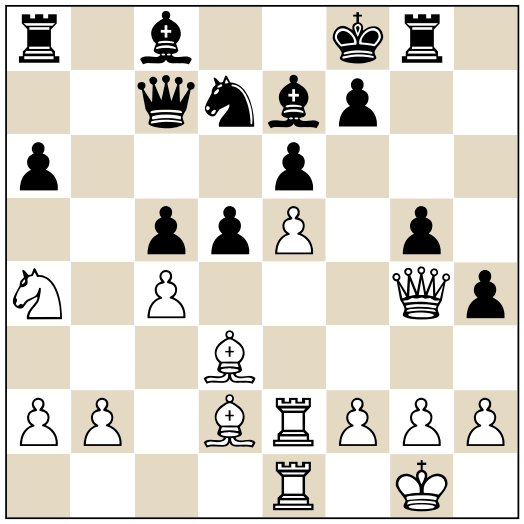
This is a funny position. When I was a child, I was often taught that when the opponent's pawn gets to g2 like this, it can often be a better defender than your own pawn! It can't be attacked, nor captured. It shouldn't be taken too literally, but there is a grain of truth here. As it stands, White can simply ignore the situation on the kingside and casually

proceed with 20.c4!? (also 20.♖ae1, intending f4, looks good too), opening up lines of attack.

18.♖ae1 c5 19.c4!

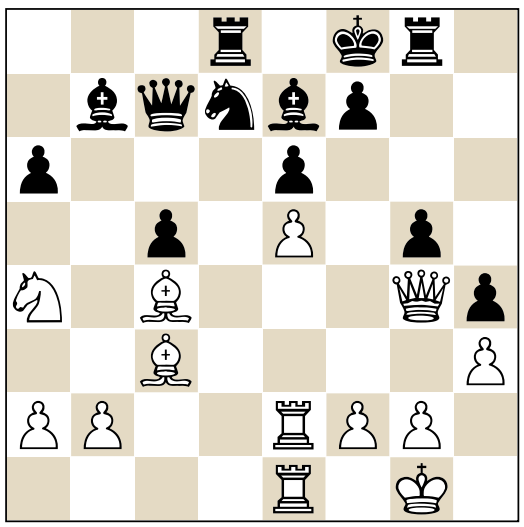


19...dxc4 The standard riposte, as indicated earlier on, would be 19... d4 – but here White just prepares to crash through with an eventual f4 with 20.♕h5! ♗b7 21.f4! gxf4 22.♗xf4 and White has all the makings of a crushing attack on the horizon.

20.♗xc4 ♗b7 21.h3

Not necessary, but why not?

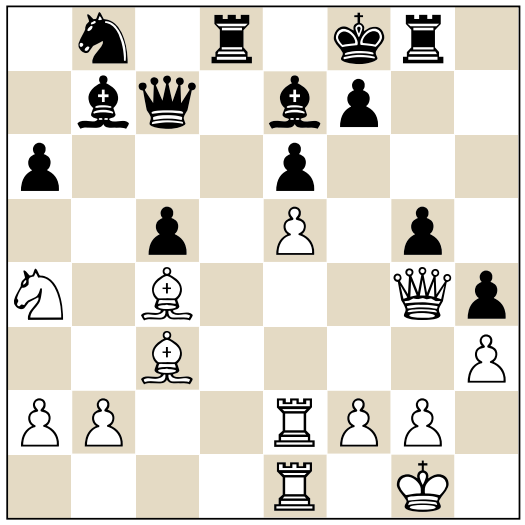
21...♖d8 22.♗c3



Fabiano is clearly in control here – and he also has a better pawn-structure on both sides of the board. But the ever-resourceful Topalov comes up with a clever idea.

22...♘b8!?

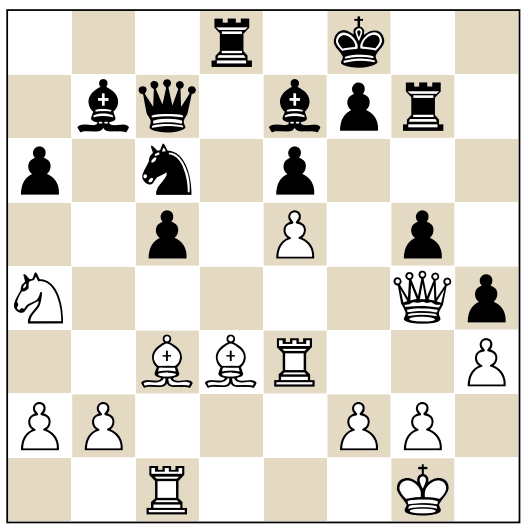
Suddenly it doesn't seem so clear after all, with the knight coming to c6 and later to d4... But Fabiano comes up with a cunning solution.



23.♖e3! ♘c6?

Following his game plan, but this just loses now, as Topalov didn't spot the thunderbolt that was coming.

While not the prettiest of moves, 23...♖g7 at least would have anticipated the piece sacrifice. Nevertheless, White would have had a clear advantage here. One way of preventing the idea of ♘c6-d4 here is 24.♖c1 ♘c6 25.♗d3



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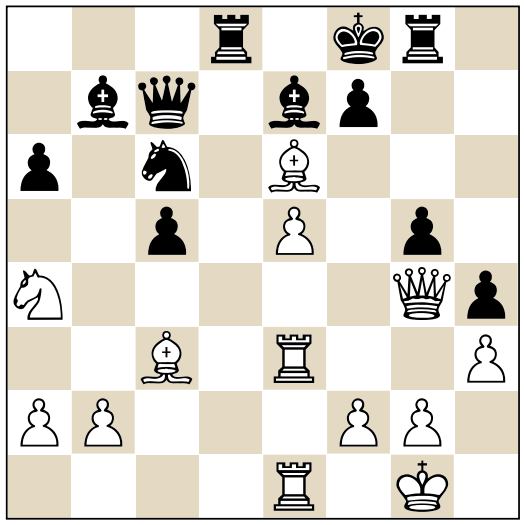
25...♕b8 (not 25...♘d4? 26.♗xd4 ♖xd4 27.♕xd4! winning) 26.♗e4!

and now 26... ♘d4 is well met by 27.♗a5!. Black is not having a good time of it here, this much I can tell you.

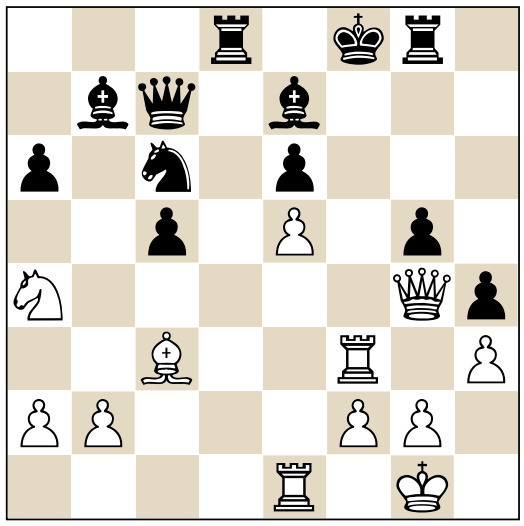
24.♗xe6!



'Boom!' Oh, how sweet it was to watch the excitement and emotion on all of those live games coming from commentator Maurice Ashley! The man was just going haywire at this point.

24...fxe6?! Throwing some piece into d4 would keep things a tad messier, but the result of the game is no longer in any doubt.

25.♖f3+

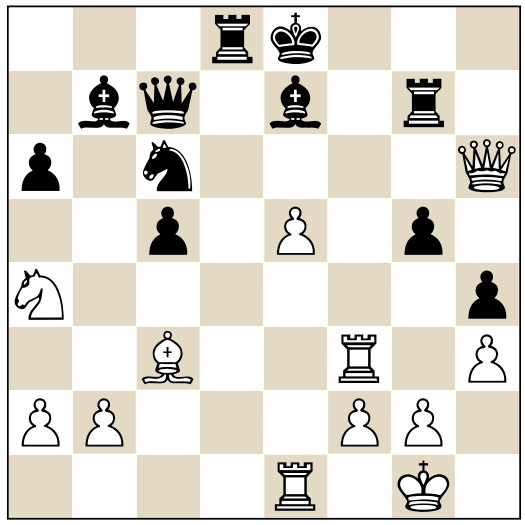


25...♔e8

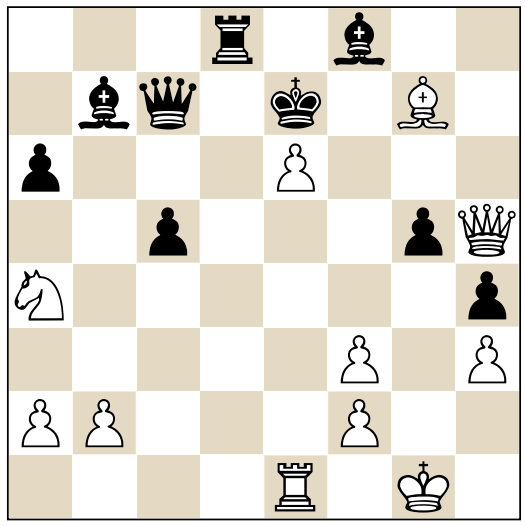
Probably what Topalov was hoping for was 25...♔g7 when allowing the sacrifice, but here he is just getting mated after 26.♕h5! ♖df8 27.♖f6!

26.♕xe6 ♖g7 27.♕h6!

The most precise – and this is Fabiano at his best!



27...♘d4 28.e6! ♘xf3+ 29.gxf3 ♗f8 30.♕h5+ ♔e7 31.♗xg7



And with queen coming in to f7, and the e-pawn marching forward, it's all over. After this, there followed the 7th win – and only then, did Fabiano start to misplay a couple of winning positions, to 'only' score 8½/10. Not bad, I'm led to believe.

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

When you think of a young and talented Frenchman, two names spring readily to mind: Vachier-Lagrave! Maxime – or 'MVL', as he's known as – is probably one of the few top players that have got a 'real' university degree. Nevertheless his studies didn't disturb his career much, and at the age of 25 he is now one of the most promising players at the world top. At times his play is brilliant, at times rather bleak too, which is probably related to psychological issues connected to nerves and confidence. The nerdy mathematician is witty and a friendly guy too, so if you are thinking of a nice guy to root for in the next top tournament, he would be a natural pick. And although this game was played five years ago, it remains forever in the annals as one of the wildest games ever played. Maxime has had many memorable victories since then, but for me this game was the most obvious choice.

B80
Alexander Morozevich
Maxime Vachier-Lagrave
Biel 2009

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6

MVL plays the Najdorf almost exclusively – and with good results too!

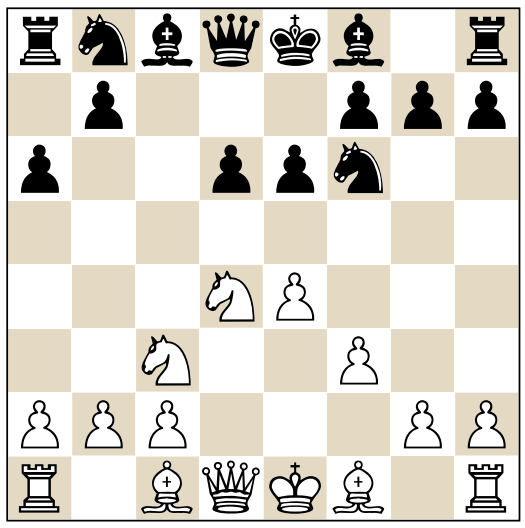
6.f3

Avoiding the annoying ...♘g4 move which has always been MVL's favourite against 6.♗e3, and now this line has become the mainstream.

'The nerdy mathematician is witty and a friendly guy too, so if you are thinking of a nice guy to root for, he would be a natural pick.'

6...e6

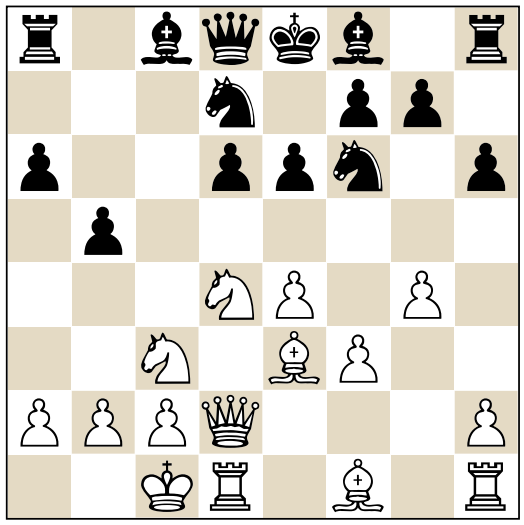
Nowadays, MVL no longer wants to experience the mixed feelings he had in this game, and prefers the safer 6...e5. Recently he used 6...e5 to win a nice game against Fabiano Caruana himself, although beating Fabiano in the Najdorf is hardly an achievement nowadays.



Maxime Vachier-Lagrave
Born: October 21, 1990
Country: France
Rating (August 1, 2015): 2731

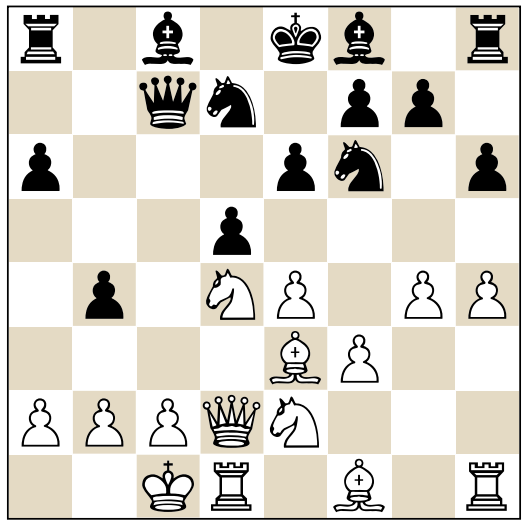
Remarkable:
MVL or 'the Frenchman with two names' (Kortchnoi) has won the Biel tournament three times (2009, 2013 and 2015).

7.♗e3 b5 8.♕d2 ♘bd7 9.g4 h6 10.0-0-0

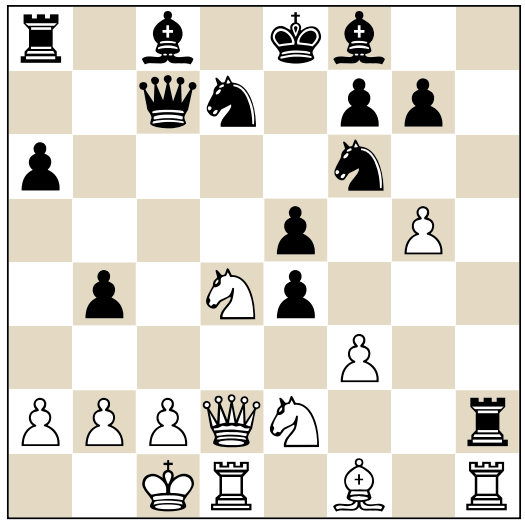


10...b4 In recent years, this variation has established itself as a theoretical giant in the Najdorf. Back in 2009, though, the players were still walking along rather unexplored paths. The old line is 10...♗b7, which goes 11.h4 b4 12.♘a4 ♕a5 and was played by MVL against Hikaru Nakamura shortly before this particular game. Although from time to time, somebody strong comes along with a new idea here for Black, overall this system is considered to be somewhat unsound.

11.♘ce2 ♕c7 12.h4 d5

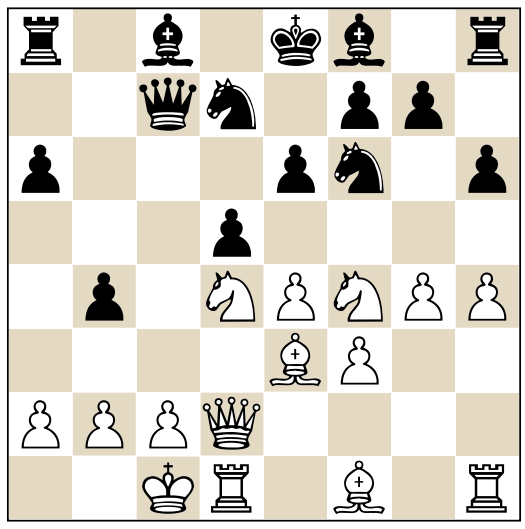


13.♘f4!? A novelty. One of the main paths nowadays is 13.♗f4, when after 13...e5 14.♗h2 dxe4 15.g5 hxg5 16.hxg5 ♖xh2!!



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

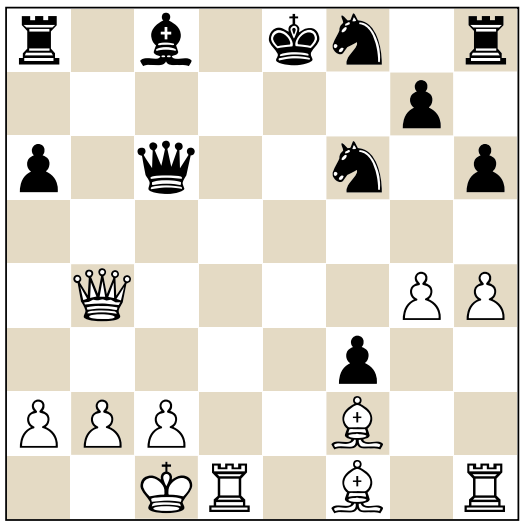
the theory is only just starting. Right now it is not so clear which side is avoiding this line – White or Black.



13...e5!?

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, aka MVL and 'the Frenchman with two names'.

The first critical decision, and the one I personally admire. MVL confessed that he briefly considered the move 13.♘f4 in his preparation, but over the board he changed his mind. His original choice was 13...dxe4 14.♘fxe6 fxe6 15.♘xe6 ♕c6 16.♘xf8 ♘xf8 17.♕xb4 exf3 18.♗f2!



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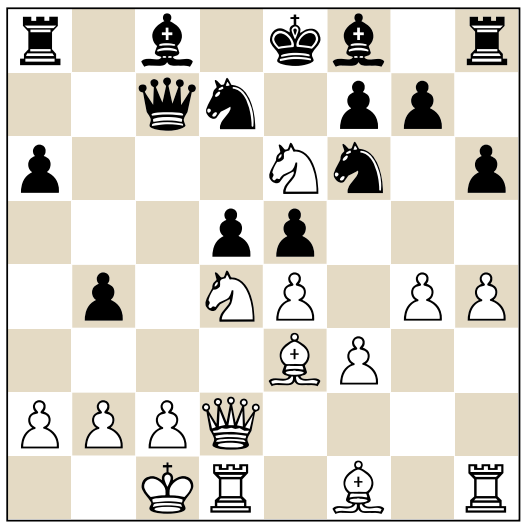
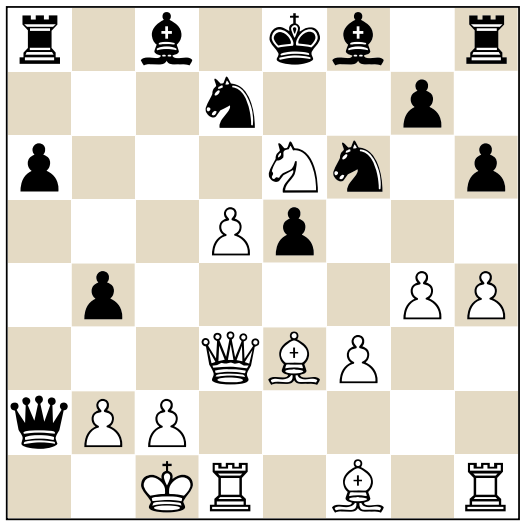
and this was the position he feared. Indeed, the machine will defend it with ease, but for a human player, playing with a bare king in the open and having no concrete play, it is rather difficult. This approach of changing your mind in the heat of battle during the game is somewhat characteristic for MVL, and it has brought him some good, as well as some bad results.

14.♘fe6!



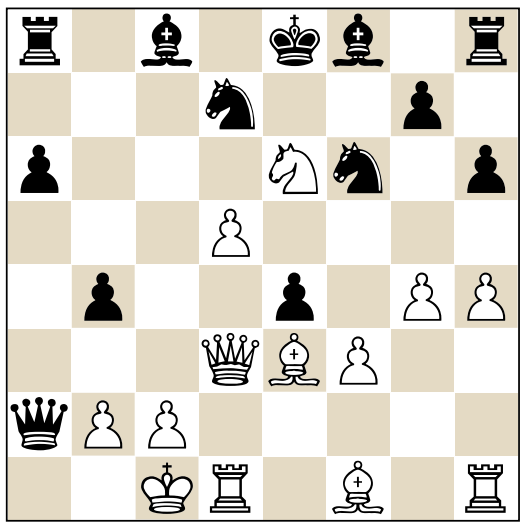
The point. Apparently Moro had spent half an hour on 13.♘f4, but that was probably one of his devilish tricks.

14...fxe6 15.♘xe6 ♕a5 16.exd5 ♕xa2 17.♕d3



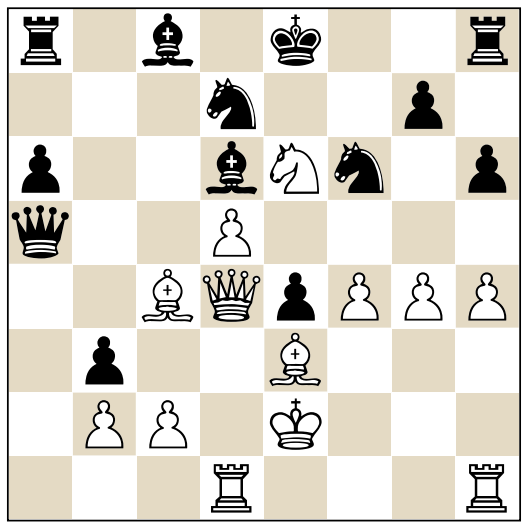
17...♔f7? The question mark is an objective assessment of the move. By no means do I expect a human player to navigate the crazy, complications of the Najdorf – even if it is the game of his life!

The right path seems to be 17...e4!.



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

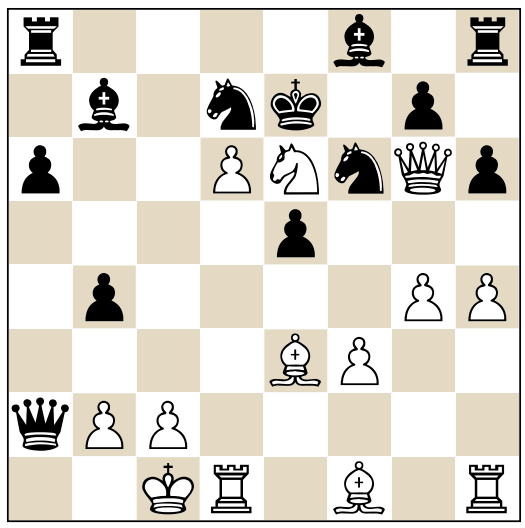
18.♕d4 ♗d6 19.♗c4 b3! 20.f4!? also looks scary, but as it turns out things aren't as bad as MVL assumed, for example: 20...♕a1+ (20...♖b8!?) 21.♔d2 ♕a5+ 22.♔e2



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

MVL had assessed this position as dangerous, but things are far from clear, one attractive possibility being 22...♗c5! and the c8-bishop is saying 'hi' – with check – to the g4-pawn: 23.♘xc5 ♕xc5.

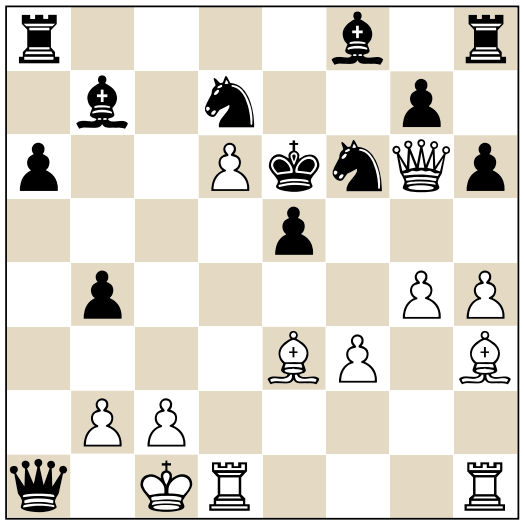
His original intention was 17...♗b7 and he rightly refused it, but for the wrong reason. 18.♕g6+ ♔e7 19.g5! (Maxime was afraid of the forcing move 19.d6+?



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

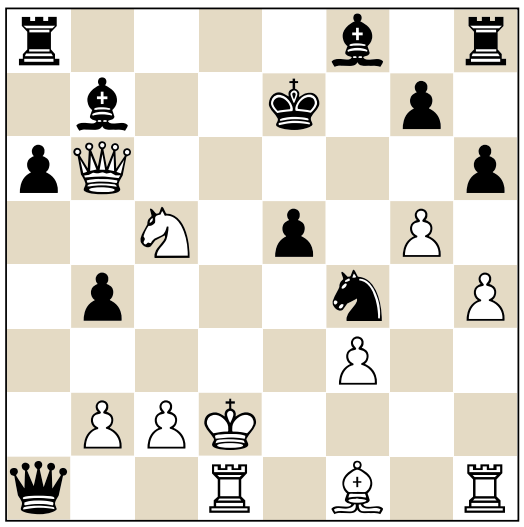
19...♔xe6 20.♗h3 which looks winning too, especially since ...♗d5 will allow some disaster, but Black has a nice way of saving himself here with 20...♕a1+! (the aforementioned disaster follows after 20...♗d5? 21.g5+

♔xd6 22.gxf6 ♘xf6 23.♖xd5+! ♕xd5 24.♖d1 – material is more or less equal, but the black king will be stranded in the wilderness, and he is just totally lost here)



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

21.♔d2 ♕a5 and White has no option other than to force a draw by repeating moves) 19...♘xd5 20.♗c5+! ♘xc5 21.♘xc5 ♕a1+ (if 21...♗c8 22.♘b3!! and the pendulum now swings in White's favour) 22.♔d2 ♘f4 23.♕b6!

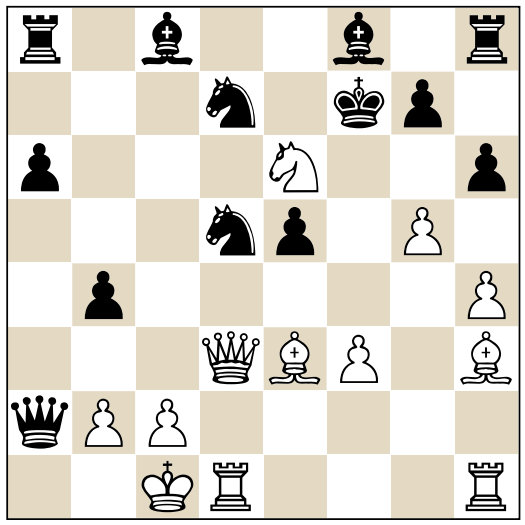


ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

Since this a variation 'crunched' by a computer, I will also give an evaluation, pointed out by him/her/it: +-3.72

18.g5 ♘xd5 19.♗h3!

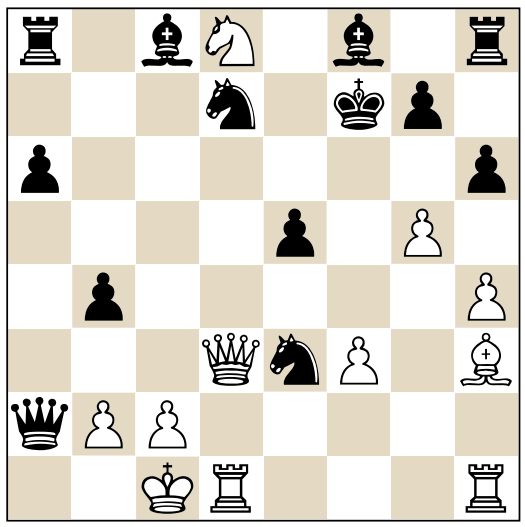
I am pretty sure MVL started to feel the heat around here.



19...♘xe3

While 19...♘7f6 looks like a 'simple' defence, just in the nick of time he saw the refutation to it: 20.♘d8+ ♔g8 21.gxf6 ♘xf6 22.♗f1!! and suddenly the knight on d8 turns into a monster, as White gains control of the a2-g8 diagonal.

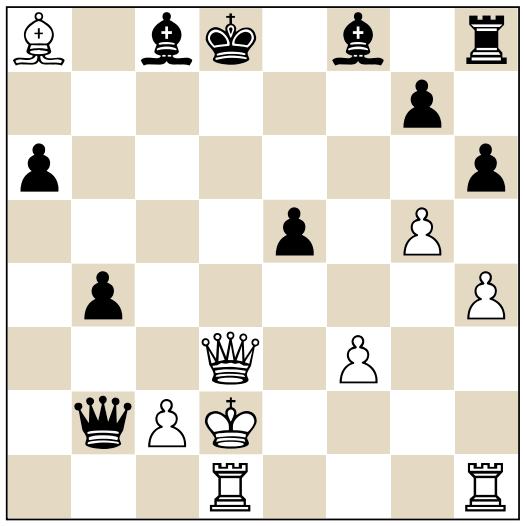
20.♘d8+



20...♔e7!? In a bad position, all moves are bad. But in a crazy bad position – as we have here – this is not always the case! While objectively losing, this move is the best from a practical point of view.

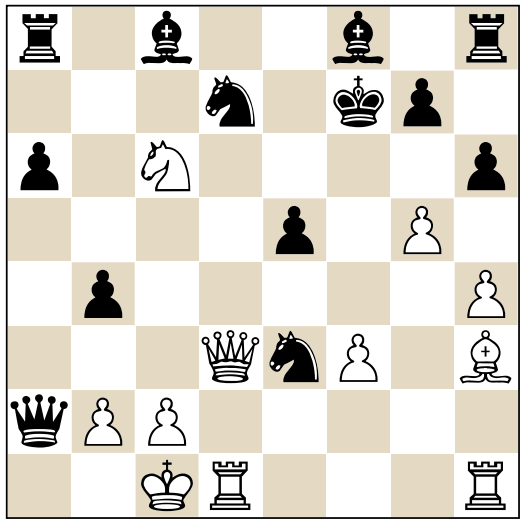
The alternative 20...♔e8 leads to the 'least lost' of the positions objec-

tively, but even here I would manage to find the way for White: 21.♗xd7+ ♔xd8 22.♗e6+ ♘d5 23.♗xd5 ♕a1+ 24.♔d2 ♕xb2 25.♗xa8+

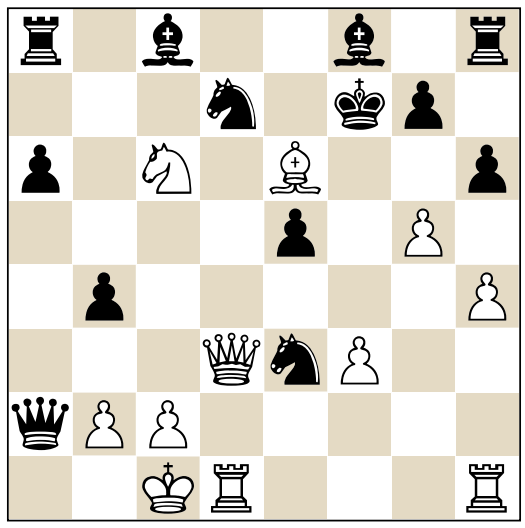


ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

and White is winning.
21.♘c6+ ♔f7

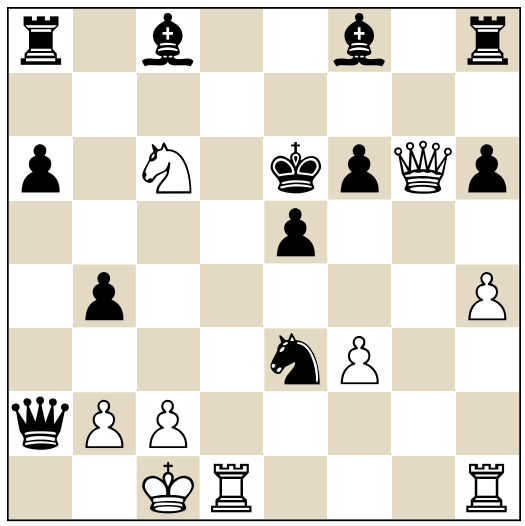


22.g6+!? Typical Morozevich! His calculation is rather chaotic, so calculating a long clean line is usually not his main strength – however to find a way to humiliate his opponent by some simple, yet brilliant concept is something he is very much capable of.
Winning was 22.♗e6+! but then this would be Moro's 'immortal game' and not MVL's!

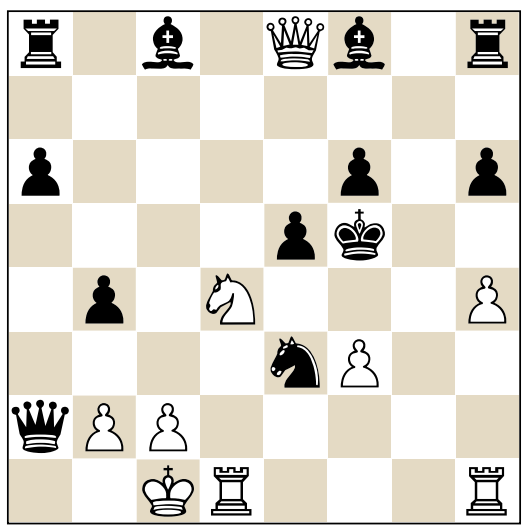


ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

22...♔xe6 23.♕g6+ ♘f6 24.♘d8+ ♔e7 25.gxf6+ gxf6 26.♘c6+ ♔e6

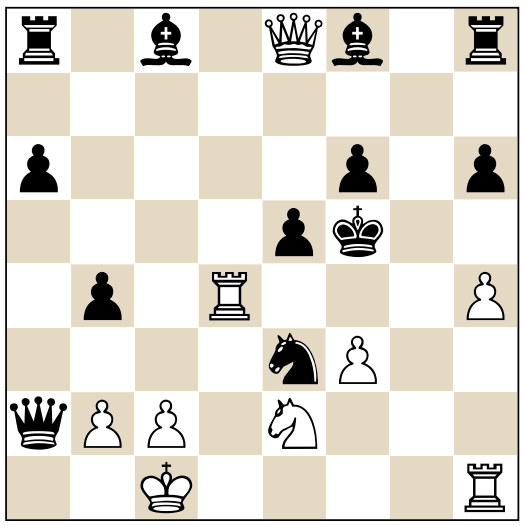


Up to here it's pretty easy, but now all the fun starts. 27.♕e8+! ♔f5 28.♘d4+!!



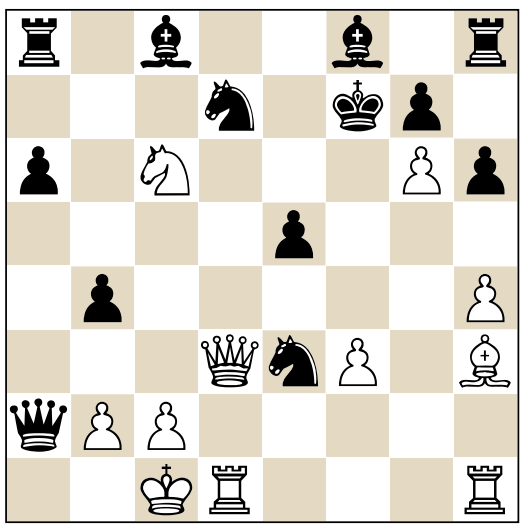
Compared to what is coming, this

is peanuts. 28...♔f4 29.♘e2+ ♔f5 30.♖d4!!

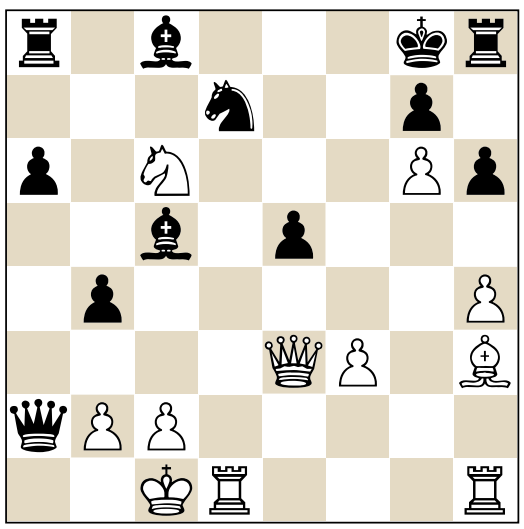


ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

And the king is trapped in a mating net. Ingenious stuff. And you tell me computers are bad for chess? Do you seriously imagine MOI coming up with all this?



22...♔g8 23.♕xe3 ♗c5

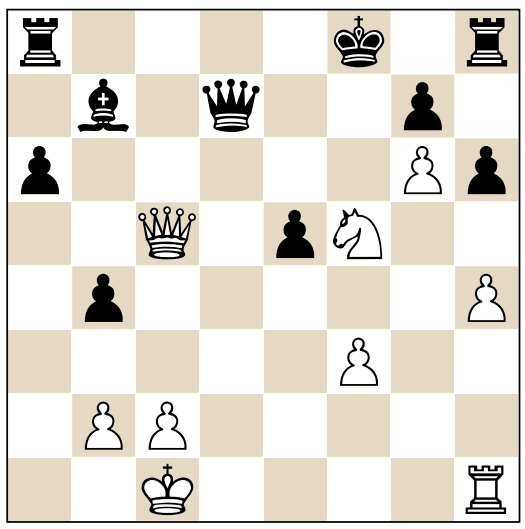


24.♕e4!?

Once again, typical Moro. I don't know why he does it: is it because he is incapable of the more forcing variations, or is it because he enjoys this? Probably the truth is somewhere in between, but perhaps it lies closer to the second explanation...

Simpler is 24.♕xc5?! – and possibly something I would have chosen on a lazy Sunday afternoon, but it gives White less than what he deserves in this position: 24...♕a1+ 25.♔d2 ♕xd1+ 26.♖xd1 ♘xc5 27.♗xc8 and White is technically winning, but the game is not over yet.

Also a forced win is 24.♗e6+! and probably the easiest one that Morozevich has missed ('easiest' being a word here meant to compare, not define!). Personally I would be glad to get rid of the annoying queen on a2: 24...♕xe6 25.♕xc5 ♗b7 26.♘e7+ ♔f8 27.♖xd7 ♕xd7 28.♘f5+ (in his annotations, MVL points out 28.♘c6+ ♔g8 29.♕c4+ ♔f8 30.♖d1 ♕c7 31.♕c5+ ♔e8 32.♖d6 but he missed a simpler solution)



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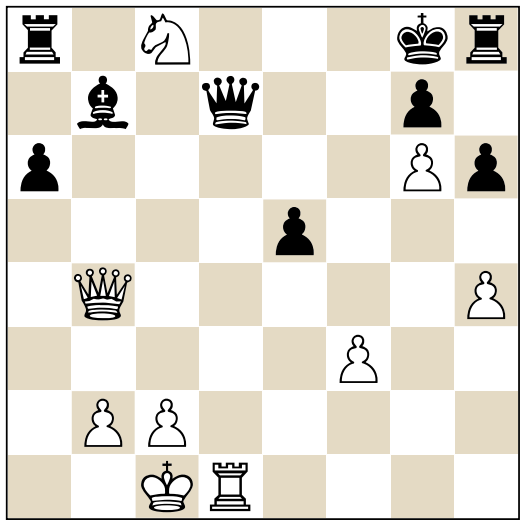
28...♔g8 29.♕c4+ ♔f8 30.♕xb4+

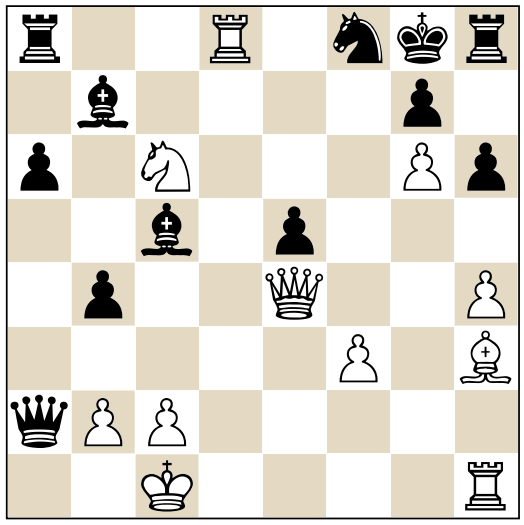
♔g8 31.♘e7+ ♔f8 32.♘c8+ ♔g8 33.♖d1



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

And White wins due to the queen being overloaded, having to protect against too many checkmates.

24...♘f8 25.♖d8 ♗b7



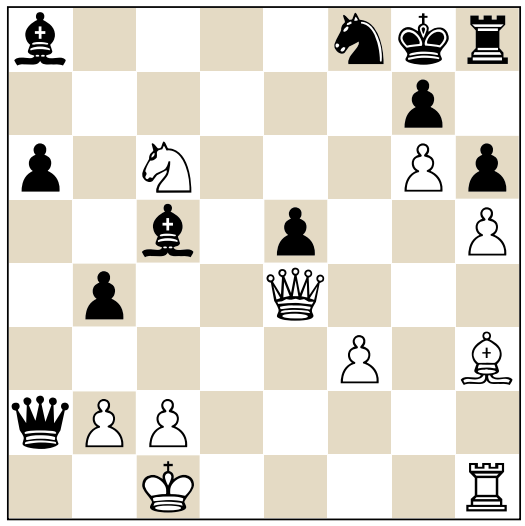
26.♖xa8

Winning by force was 26.♖xf8+!, but after each capture, the win is by no means all that obvious: 26...♖xf8 (the alternatives fair no better: 26...♗xf8 27.♕xe5; 26...♔xf8 27.♕f5+ ♔g8 28.♕xe5) 27.♕xe5 ♗c8 28.♗xc8 ♖xc8 29.♕xc5 ♕e6 30.♘e7+ and Black can resign.

26...♗xa8 27.h5!?

Time and again, Morozevich is choosing the least forcing of the wins. White keeps the bind and it seems that nothing can stop an eventual mate along the a2-g8 diagonal, but alas...

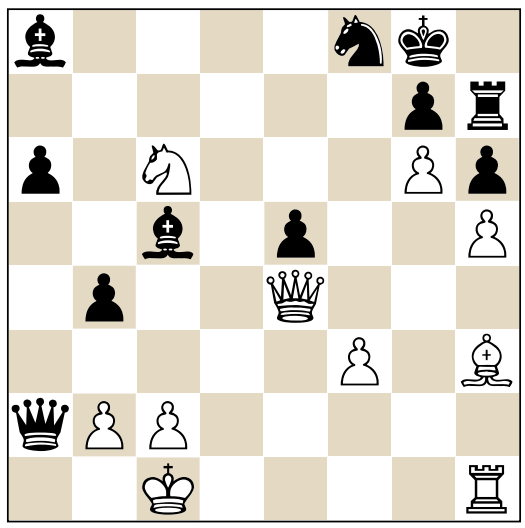
Simplest was 27.♗f1 ♗xc6 28.♗c4+ ♘e6 29.♕f5 ♗e3+ 30.♔d1 ♗xf3+ 31.♕xf3 ♕b1+ 32.♔e2 ♕xc2+ 33.♔xe3 ♕xg6 34.♖d1! winning.



27...♖h7!!

This stunning move doesn't save the game, but considering that the alternative was resignation, it is especially strong. Now Morozevich began to lose his cool.

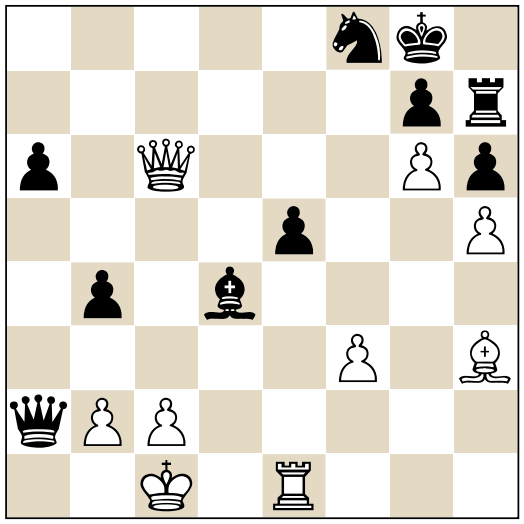
And for those wondering, 27...♗xc6 28.♕xc6 ♗d4 is just lost, as the immediate 29.♗f1 wins, as does any preparatory move, such as 29.♔d2!?.



28.♖e1

The more precise 28.♔d2! was needed to finally clinch it. 28...♔h8 29.♕xe5! and White wins.

28...♗xc6 29.♕xc6 ♗d4



Has some counterplay suddenly appeared!?

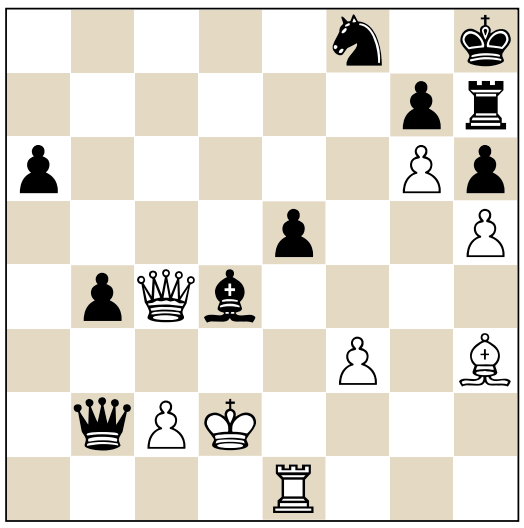
30.♔d2 Easier was 30.♔d1!, avoiding the checks on c3.

30...♕xb2 31.♕c4+

Morozevich rightly sees that he needs to defend his king by using his domination on the light squares.

But the more obvious 31.♗e6+ ♔h8 32.♔e2 wins. White has taken control of all the light squares and will invade the 8th rank with the queen.

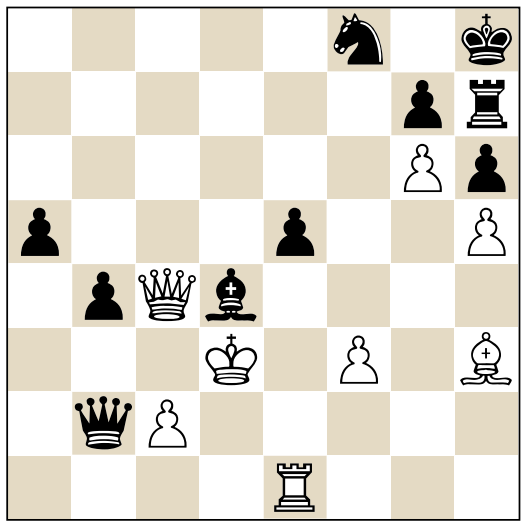
31...♔h8



32.♔d3!?

If there is something that Alexander Morozevich doesn't lack, than that is the sense of aesthetics. The king is beautiful on e4, but in fact it's not as safe there as it appears...

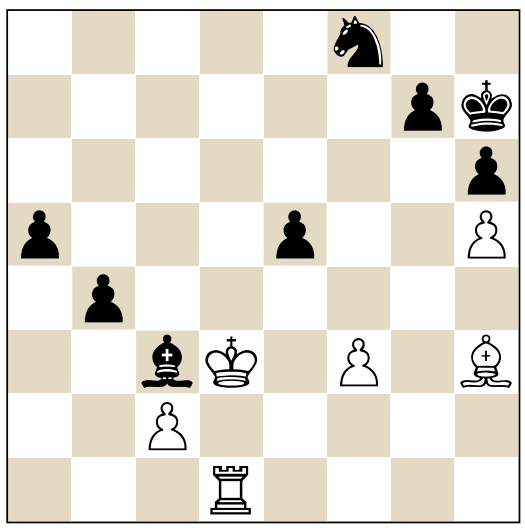
32...a5 Also 32...♕a3+! 33.♔e4 ♕a5 would have been quite nasty with the idea 34.♕c8 ♗c5.



33.♕c8?? This is the winning idea, but White had to prepare it much better than he has.

One of the careful options is 33.♗f5! which should do, as now gxh7 is a big threat.

Also good is 33.gxh7 but here Black can at least fight on with 33...♕c3+!? 34.♕xc3 ♗xc3 35.♖d1 ♔xh7



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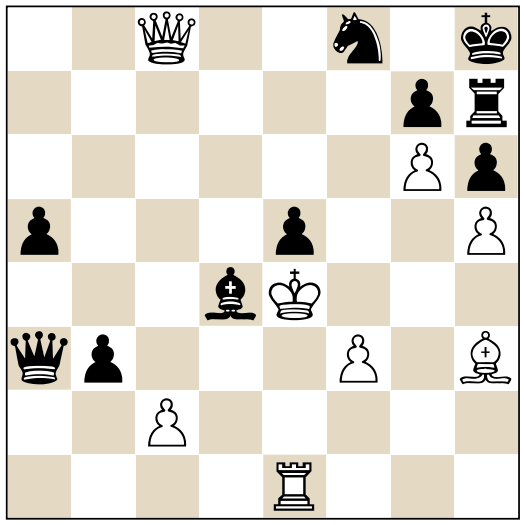
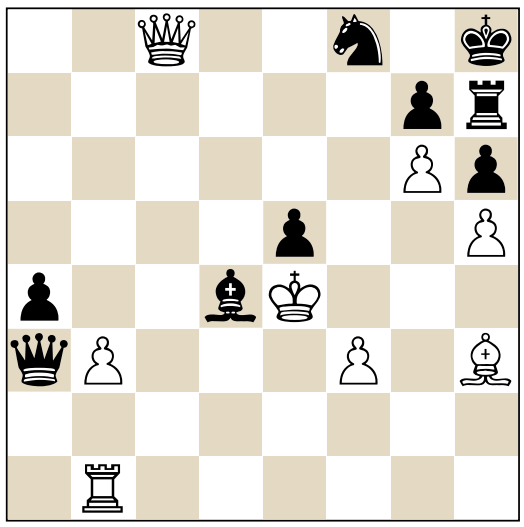
And suddenly the a-pawn becomes a thorn in White's side.

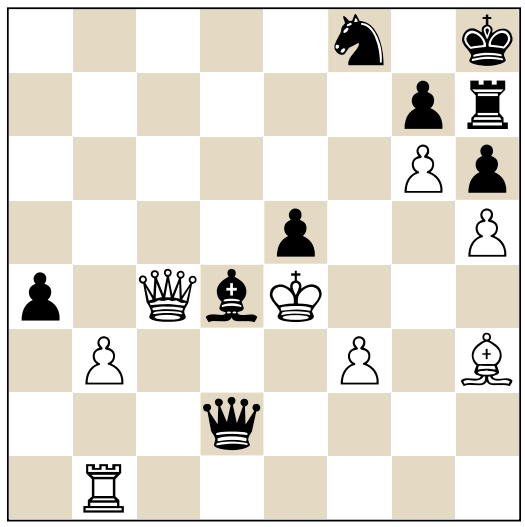
33...♕a3+! 34.♔e4 b3!
Suddenly the queen on a3 is protecting the knight. Moreover, White's king starts to feel rather unsafe. The position is already balanced.



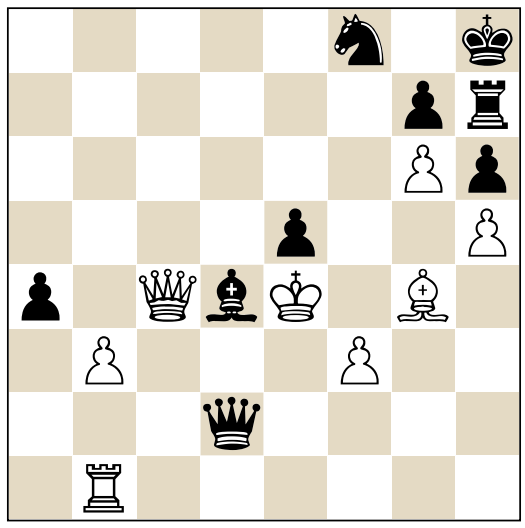
35.cxb3 a4! By opening up more files, White's king now gets into real danger. **36.♖b1** Moro did have a bail-out with 36.bxa4 ♗f2 which will eventually lead to some sort of a perpetual.



36...♕b4 Suddenly the killer inside MVL has awakened! Instead, forcing the draw was 36...axb3 37.♖xb3 ♕xb3 38.♕xf8+ ♕g8 39.♕xg8+ ♔xg8 40.♗e6+ ♔h8 41.♗f5 ♗a1 and both players can share the point here.
37.♕c4 ♕b7+ 38.♕d5 ♕b4 39.♕c4 ♕d2!



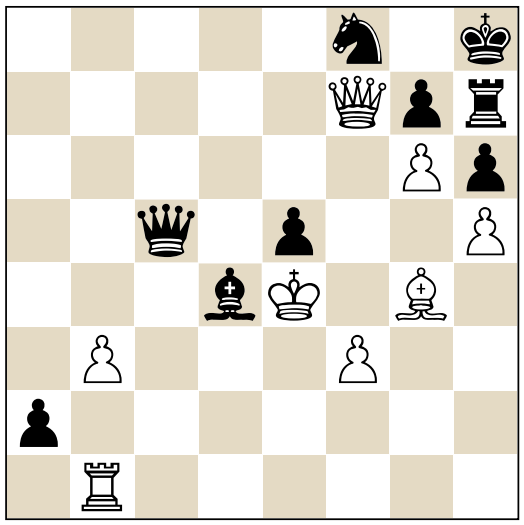
Ouch! Seriously, is he playing for a win? Rightly so!
40.♗g4?
Stabilising everything before the time control, but forgetting all about the a-pawn.
However, instead he should have played 40.gxh7 ♕e3+ 41.♔d5 ♕xf3+ 42.♔d6 and due to the threat of ♕g8 mate, Black must spend a tempo to capture on h7: 42...♕f6+ 43.♔c7 ♕b6+ 44.♔c8 ♘xh7 45.♕xa4 and this is dangerous for White, but he should hold.
Apparently also holding is 40.♕c8!, but don't make me explain it. The point is that White is forcing Black to worry about his back rank.



40...a3!

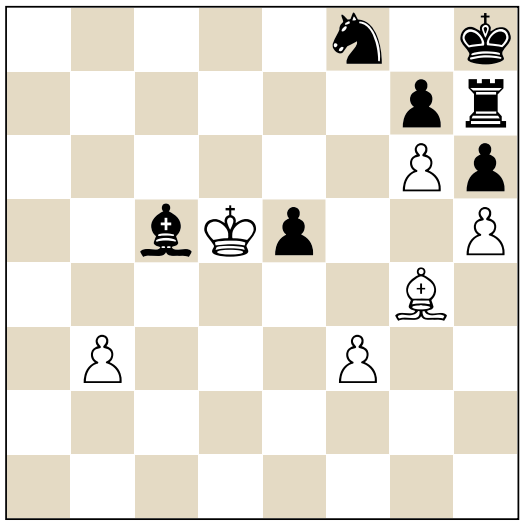
Now Black is winning – what a roll-ercoaster ride!

41.♕f7 ♕c2+ 42.♔d5 ♕c5+ 43.♔e4 a2



The rest would appear easy, as Black wins a whole rook, but it turns out we are far from the end.

44.♖c1 a1♕ 45.♖xc5 ♗xc5 46.♕d5 ♕e1+ 47.♔d3 ♕d1+ 48.♔c4 ♕xd5+ 49.♔xd5

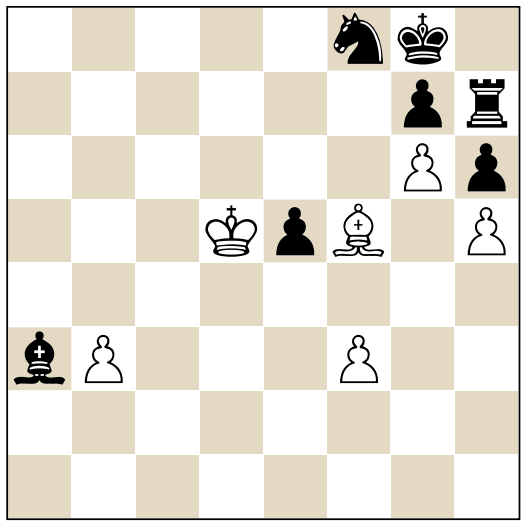


Black is up a piece and a (dead) rook. Even if White were to take off the rook, he would be lost immediately, but by not taking it, Morozevich illustrates the power of the king in an endgame. Without being able to activate his king, it is not clear how Black wants to win this position.

49...♗a3

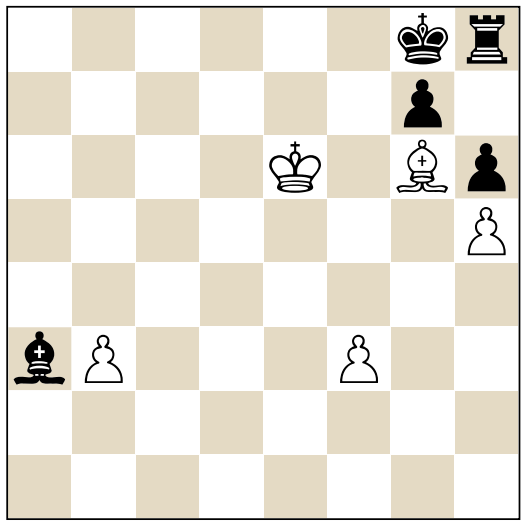
Instead, 49...♘xg6! would make it less poetic. The rook now escapes after 50.hxg6 h5!

50.♗f5 ♔g8



51.♔xe5!? As I mentioned earlier, 51.gxh7+ ♘xh7 is an easy win as Black is just a piece up.

51...♖h8 And here is the beauty of chess, as after 51...♘xg6+ 52.♗xg6 ♖h8 53.♔e6



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is a brilliant positional draw. White will pre-move ♔e6-d7-e6 forever.

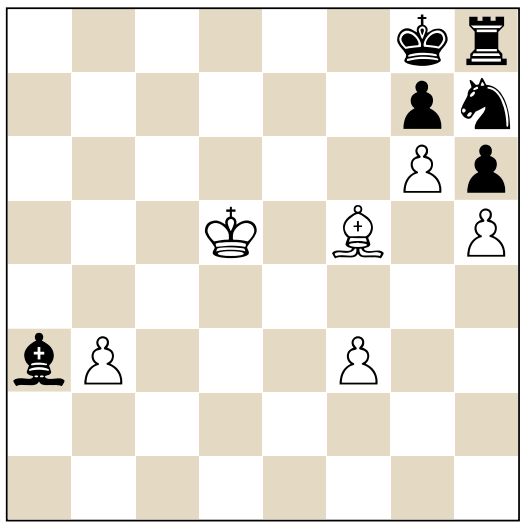
52.♔d5

At first you think that 52.♗e6+ ♘xe6 53.♔xe6 ♔f8 54.♔d7 might look like a draw – but once you remember the rule that each side CANNOT skip his turn, then you

realise that White soon will have to let the king come out and then the rook will follow.

52...♘h7!!

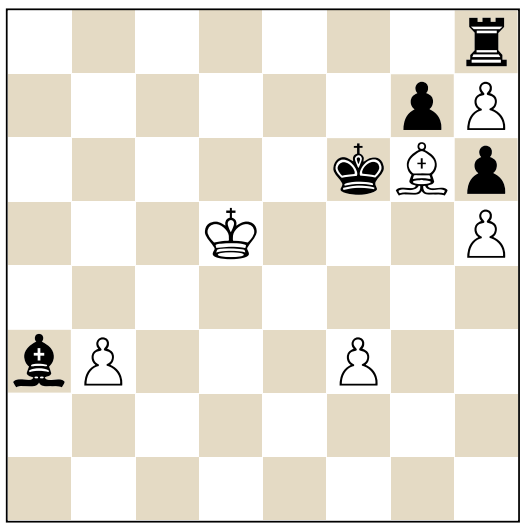
The only way to activate the pieces.



53.gxh7+ ♔f7!

And certainly not 53...♖xh7? as 54.♗g6! is once again the pre-move draw option of ♔e6-d7-e6.

54.♗g6+! ♔f6

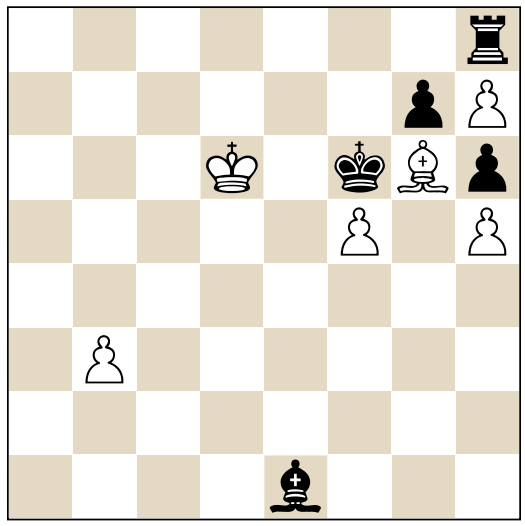


The key to this position is, as always, zugwang. What Black would eventually like to achieve is for White to have to move his g6-bishop, and he'll then be able to go …g7-g5, and after hxg6 he will be able to control the h-pawn queening square with the bishop, thus finally freeing his rook from the 8th rank. But first it's time to pick up some pawns!

55.f4 ♗c1 56.f5

Also the option 56.b4 was losing to the same idea: 56...♗xf4 57.♔c6 ♔e6 58.b5 ♖d8 59.b6 ♖b8 60.b7 ♖f8 (zugzwang!) 61.♔b6 ♔d6 62.♔b5 ♔c7 63.♗e4 g5 64.hxg6 ♗e5 and now the rook is free.

56...♗d2 57.♔d6 ♗e1

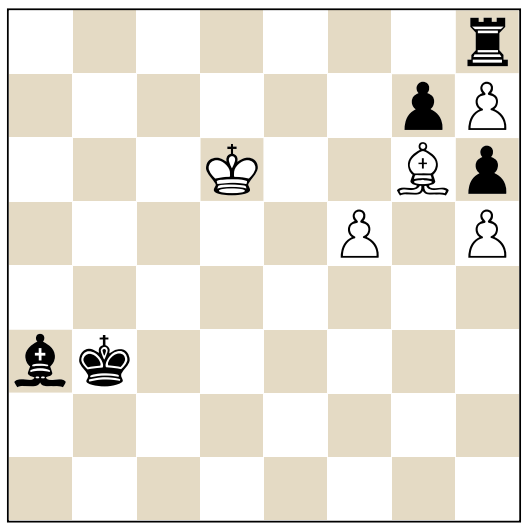


58.♔d7

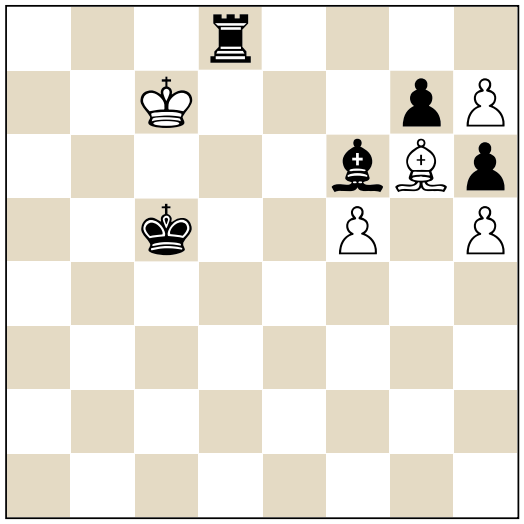
If 58.♔d5 ♖d8+!, the rook still does a great deal of help, even by moving only along the 8th rank!

58...♗b4 59.♔c7 ♔e5 60.♔d7 ♗a3 61.♔c6 ♔d4 62.♔c7 ♔c3 63.♔d7 ♔b4 64.♔d6 ♔xb3+

Now the pawn is gone, Black can slowly but surely get the desirable zugzwang.



65.♔d5 ♗b2 66.♔d6 ♗f6
67.♔c5 ♔c3 68.♔d6 ♔d4
69.♔c6 ♖d8 70.♔b6 ♔d5
71.♔c7 ♔c5



The moment of truth. Now either the king will get cornered and mated or the g-pawn will get the green light.

72.♗f7

If 72.♔b7 ♗e5 and we get to corner the king for mate.

72...g5! 73.fxg6 ♖d6

The rook is free and the mate appears surprisingly quickly.

74.♗e8 ♗e5 75.♔b7 ♖b6+
76.♔c8 ♔d6

With ...♔e7 and ...♖b8 mate to follow. White resigned.

Moral of this game: Fight and thou shall be rewarded.

Hikaru Nakamura

One of the more colourful figures at the top of the chess world is definitely Hikaru Nakamura. Known for his controversial behaviour on and off the board, Hikaru is, in fact, a much nicer guy than generally perceived. Emulating Kasparov's mimics and style, Hikaru knows how to set the board on fire; but his critics often say that he lacks some fundamental chess education. Well, having sat across the guy on numerous occasions over the past five years, I can tell you that Hikaru is a quick learner, and now and again he surprises us with a positional masterpiece. If only his score against Magnus Carlsen was a little better... but then again, here is a game by Hikaru against Peter Svidler, where the seven-time Russian champion gets crushed by his 'client' (before this game, the score was +6 for Svidler).

E71
Peter Svidler
Hikaru Nakamura
Rhodes 2013

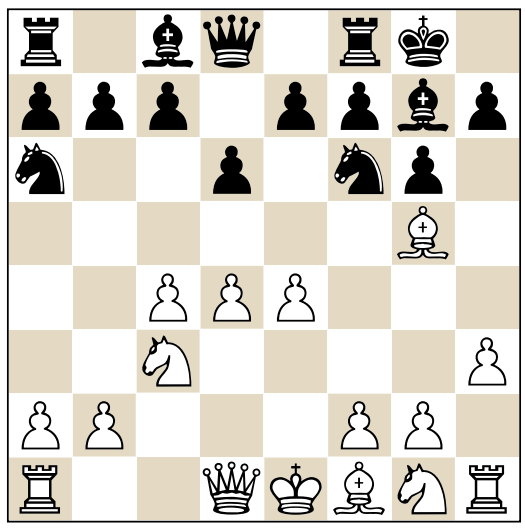
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 Lately, Hikaru has become a lot more solid and his games often feature openings such as the Slav, Queen's Gambit and even the Berlin Defence. Having said that, every now and then Hikaru loves to pull out his trusty old King's Indian from his armoury.

5.h3 0-0 6.♗g5
Not the most common system here, but there is still a lot of theory on this. White may have prevented the standard black reply of …e5, but now

> 'Hikaru is a quick learner, and now and again he surprises us with a positional masterpiece.'

the Benoni becomes a more attractive option, now that White hasn't started developing his kingside.

6...♘a6!?
The aforementioned Benoni set-up with …c5 is more popular here. This is a viable plan also; Black usually intends …♖e8, followed by …e5 taking the game back towards a more normal KID.

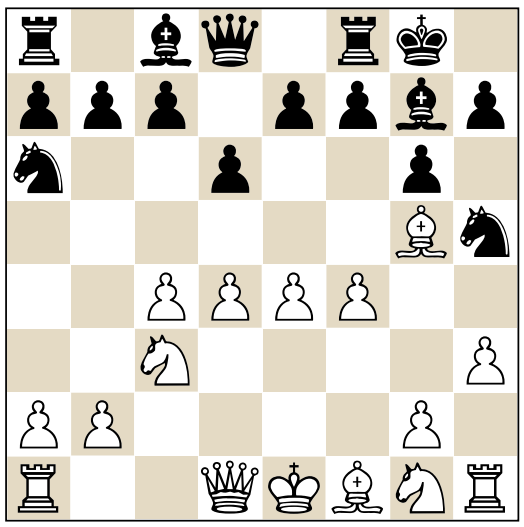


Hikaru Nakamura
Born: December 9, 1987
Country: United States
Rating (August 1, 2015): 2814

Remarkable:
Garry Kasparov called Nakamura's win in Wijk aan Zee in 2011 the best American tournament performance since Pillsbury's win at Hastings 1895.

7.f4!? This move looks a little provocative here, with the pawn being on h3 – probably improvised by Svidler. It is a common way to play in a similar line where White also plays ♗g5, but has played ♗e2 instead of h2-h3. And there it seems somewhat more sensible.

7...♘h5!?

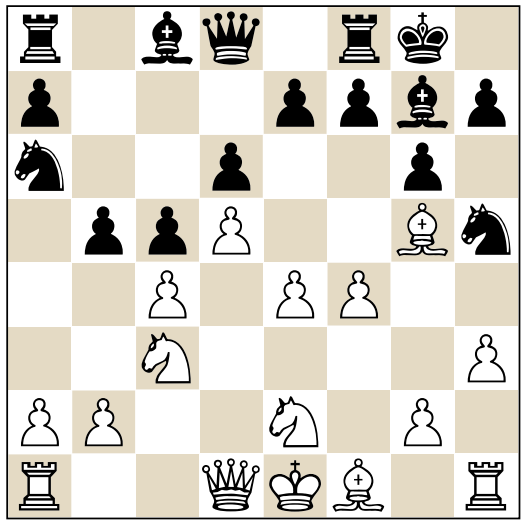


Very logical, highlighting immediately the weakness of the g3-square. Having said that, Black is also playing with fire a little, but that's Hikaru's usual stock-in-trade.

8.♘ge2 Now the g3-square is covered, and White is ready to push the knight back with g4. That will make it the fifth pawn on the fourth rank. Such expansions are beautiful but, as the saying goes, great power holds great responsibilities. White has to constantly watch out for an unexpected pawn break.

8...c5 9.d5 b5!?

The most direct approach, like the Benko, and in the aggressive style Kasparov was always famous for. He would start off with a King's Indian and then throw in this pawn sacrifice at the first possible opportunity! As a rule, this approach should usually be tried once the bishop is on g5. The reason being that the b2-pawn is then slightly weakened and the development of the kingside somewhat neglected.



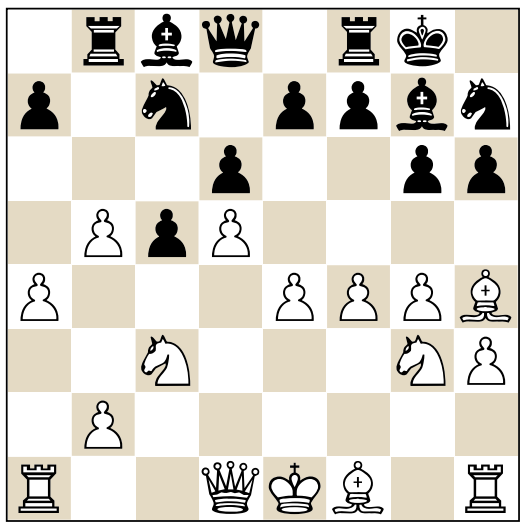
10.cxb5 ♘c7 11.a4

This is a typical move, strengthening the captured pawn – but with White lagging in development, I would personally have preferred developing the pieces.

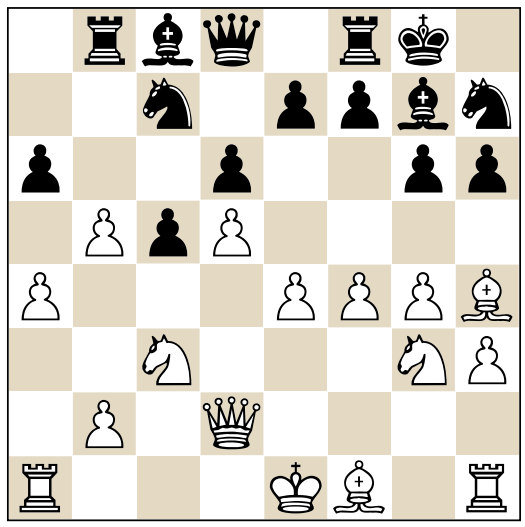
Instead, if 11.g4 ♘f6 12.♘g3 a6!? and now only here 13.a4 – but then again, this is a really just a matter of taste. Quite frankly, White has already burnt his bridges and just has to go with the flow.

Hikaru Nakamura is known for his controversial behaviour on and off the board.

11...♖b8 12.g4 ♘f6 13.♘g3 h6 14.♗h4 ♘h7! Creative use of the original features now in the position. Suddenly, Black is threatening to win the piece with …g6-g5. One of those rare case where voluntarily retreating the knight back to h7 turns out to be a good move.

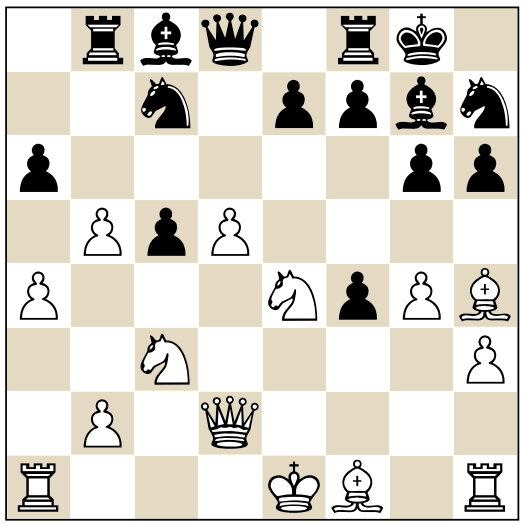


15.♕d2 a6!
White may have taken a lot of space, but he now has to watch out for threats on both sides of the board. White is by no means in any trouble yet, but he has to be vigilant as his position is not all that easy to play.



16.♗c4 This, to me, is the critical phase of the game. And at such moments, you have to asses the alternatives. First, 16.e5!? 'feels' wrong, but it was an option. Now 16...dxe5

17.♘ge4 and the knight comes into the game, and at the same time the bishop on h4 can now stop worrying about his life – but now Black can show some creativity with 17...exf4!?



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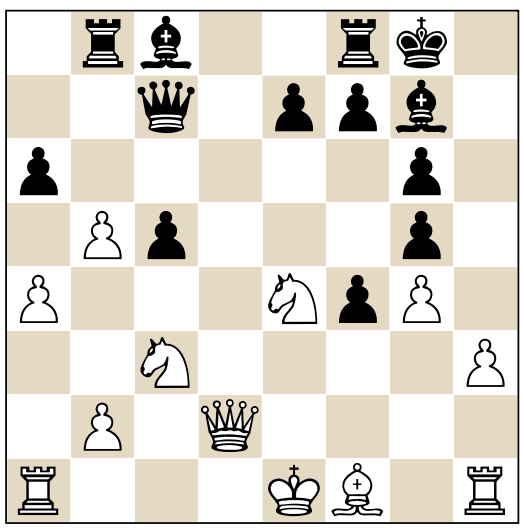
18.d6 ♘g5! 19.dxc7 ♕xc7 20.♗xg5 hxg5



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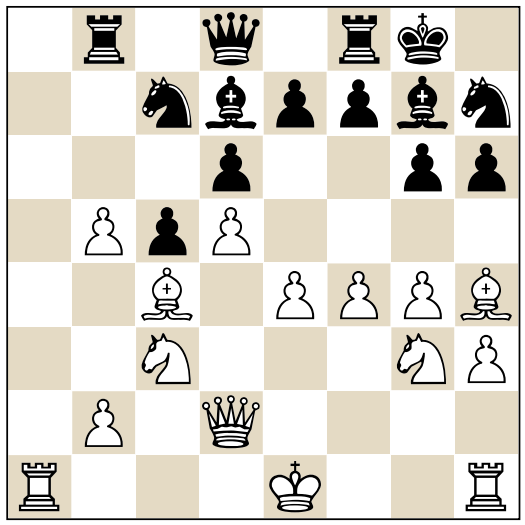
and it's a crazy house – though since White is yet to finish his development, I would probably prefer Black, and so would most of my colleagues – although there are more greedy individuals among us out there than one would expect.

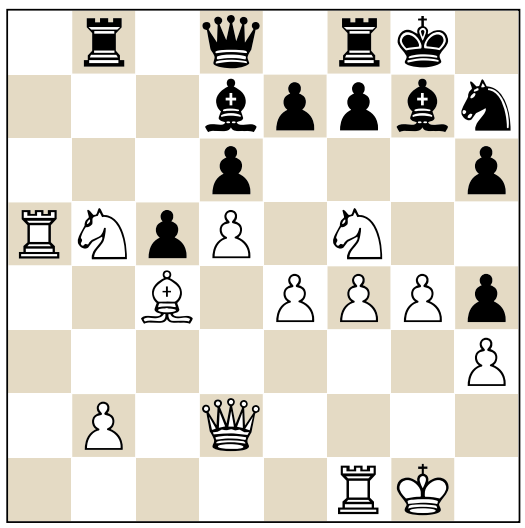
Also worth considering was 16.♗d3, which is similar to the game, just a little different. The abundance of such options usually causes a lot of headaches when it comes to the decision-making process.

16...axb5 17.axb5 ♗d7



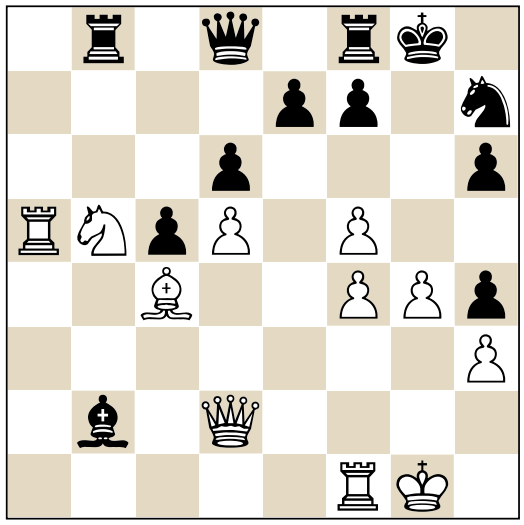
18.e5? Sometimes you just have to close your eyes and go for it. This was the moment to do so, but this move is not the right way.

What had to be played was 18.♖a5! And yes, there are a lot of tricks; and yes, White seems somewhat overloaded, but now it would be up to Hikaru to come up with something concrete. In fact, the position is far from being clear, for example: 18...♘xb5!? (if 18...♗xc3 19.bxc3 ♗xb5 20.♗xb5 ♘xb5 21.♖a1! and here, White is suddenly doing well) 19.♘xb5! g5 20.0-0! gxh4 21.♘f5



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

And here for a change, I would probably pick White... though after 21...♗xf5 22.exf5 ♗xb2!



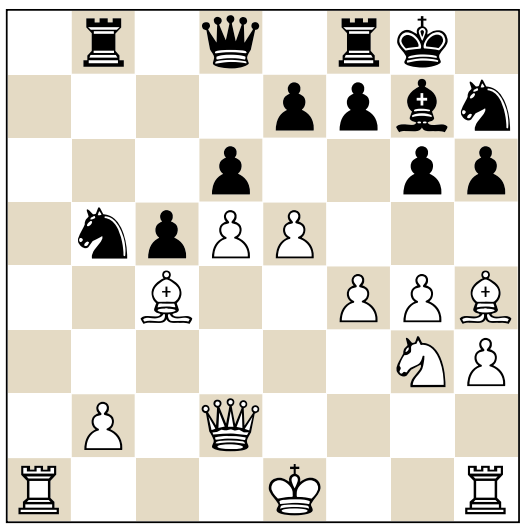
ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

the position is absurd, yet balanced.

18...♗xb5

Usually in such positions, when the b5-pawn falls and the c7-knight gets active, it means that something has gone horribly wrong for White. This is one of those times.

19.♘xb5 ♘xb5



20.♕a5?

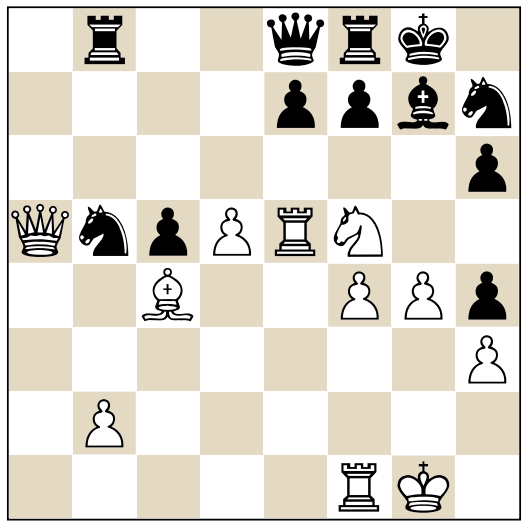
The position was already very bad, but this move really makes no sense at all.

20...♕e8 21.0-0 g5

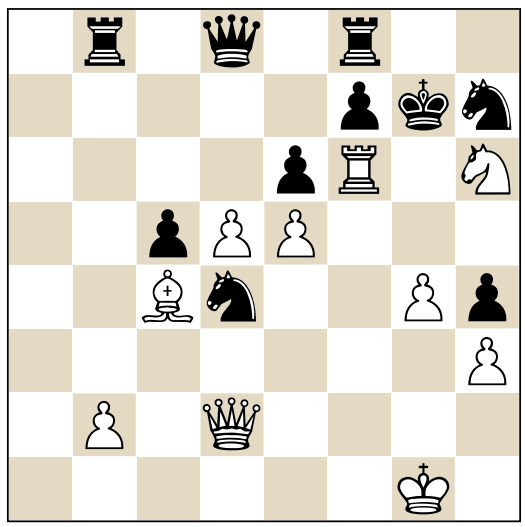
Since the queen has left d2, Black can just pick up the h4-bishop. Granted, White can now activate his knight to a good outpost – but a full piece is too high a price to pay even for that.

22.♘f5 gxh4 23.♖ae1 dxe5 24.♖xe5

I often think that having a beautifully lost position is far better than having an ugly lost one – but at the end of the day, it probably doesn't matter. Here White's position looks nice, but the problem is that he lacks a full rook.



24...♗xe5 25.fxe5 e6 26.♘xh6+ ♔g7 27.♕d2 ♕d8 28.♖f6 ♘d4



29.♘xf7 ♘xf6

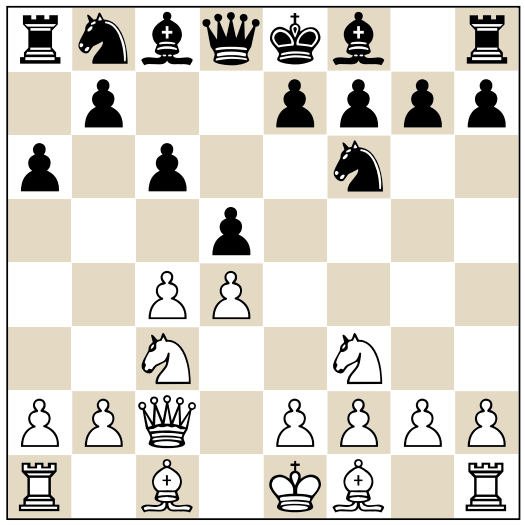
With a fork on f3 looming large, and with no pieces left to sacrifice, Svidler decided it's time to finally throw in the towel.

Alexander Grischuk

When making a selection of young players, you wouldn't immediately think of Alexander Grischuk. True, he is far from being a youngster, especially in the modern age – and yet it is perhaps now that Alexander is finally approaching his peak. His time-trouble issue is his strength and his weakness, depending on his form and the alignment of the stars. And now with the World Championship cycle consisting of tournaments with the increment starting from the first move, Grischuk's chances of challenging for the World Championship increased drastically. The talented Russian has a unique positional understanding of chess and is highly respected amongst his colleagues. Here is one of the many games in which he humiliates a top GM by means of what appears to be simple moves, but the positional depth which Alexander delves into deserves our admiration.

D15
Alexander Grischuk
Alexander Morozevich
Moscow 2014

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 a6 5.♕c2!? Alexander Grischuk is full of interesting ideas at the early stages of the game. This move has been played a few times recently by GM Simon Williams, which is generally a signature of insanity.



5...g6
Not very critical, but Morozevich just wanted to deviate from the main road of Grischuk's preparation.
All the insanity starts after 5...dxc4.

'The talented Russian has a unique positional understanding of chess and is highly respected amongst his colleagues.'

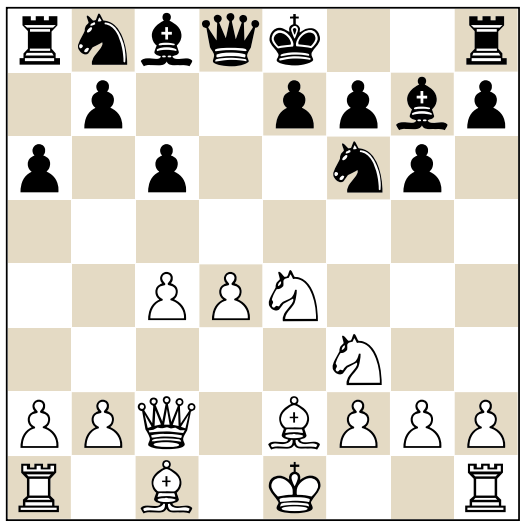
White is unlikely to regain the pawn; and soon the game might resemble a Botvinnik Variation of some sort.
6.e4!?
Interesting, and at the same time a logical way of developing.
Alternatively, 6.cxd5 resolving the crisis in the centre always makes

Alexander Grischuk
Born: October 31, 1983
Country: Russia
Rating (August 1, 2015): 2771

Remarkable:
A tireless promoter of faster time controls, he won the Blitz World Championship in Rishon-Lezion in 2006 and in Astana in 2012.

sense against all the setups that includes the bishop on g7. I believe White retains a slight edge after 6...cxd5 7.♗g5 ♗g7 8.e3 ♘c6 9.♗e2 0-0 10.0-0, but this obviously can't be much, considering that the queen is not ideally placed on c2.

6...dxe4 7.♘xe4 ♗g7 8.♗e2

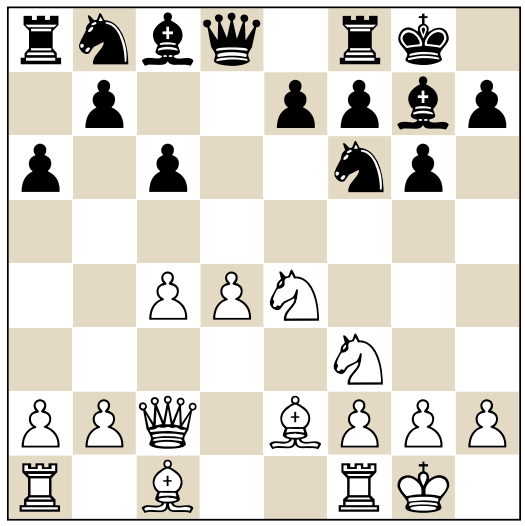


8...0-0?!

Actually, I believe this was a very critical point in the game. After this natural move, I no longer see how Black could attain equal chances.

Creative, though, is 8...♘xe4!? 9.♕xe4 c5!? exploiting the fact that White hasn't castled yet – and for this reason, basically the pawn cannot be captured: 10.d5 (10.dxc5 ♕a5+!) 10...♗f5 11.♕h4 Now this move would have been good, had Black already castled, but here Black has some interesting options, for example 11...h6!? 12.0-0 g5 13.♕g3 ♕d6, when the queens will have to be exchanged, and Black has a promising, Benoni-like endgame. This probably means that White should have gone 11.♕e3 in this variation, but anyway this would be a better way for Black to play.

9.0-0



9...♗f5

Allowing the queen to h4 is not very pleasant once you have castled short, so this is a safer way to develop.

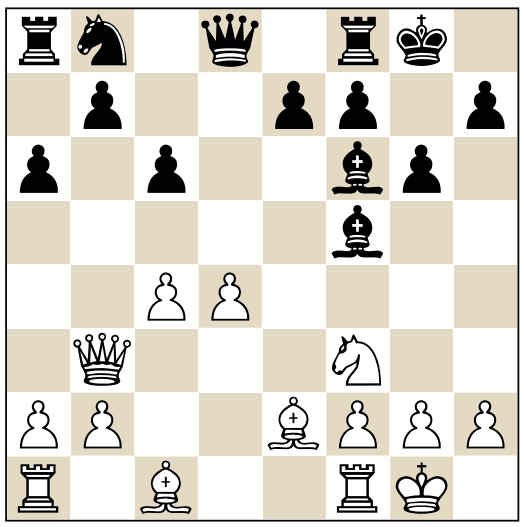
While in a blitz game, such positions after 9...♘xe4 10.♕xe4 ♗f5 11.♕h4 may win automatically (followed up with ♗h6 and ♘g5 mating ideas), in a classical game between two top GM's, the situation is still rather unpleasant for Black.

10.♘xf6+ ♗xf6

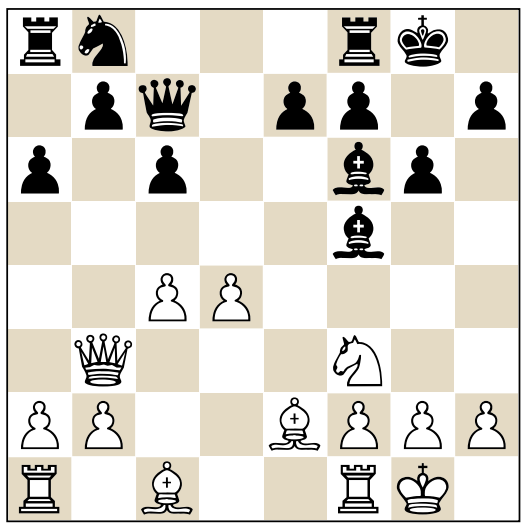
Interesting was 10...exf6 where we'll get a sort of structure similar to some sidelines of the Caro-Kann; but I don't think that Black has a good version here.

At the age of 31, Alexander Grischuk is perhaps finally approaching his peak.

11.♕b3!
Now Black needs to waste another move to defend the b7-pawn.



11...♕c7?! Simple, but then against Alexander Grischuk simple moves don't guarantee you an easy life. Considering that Morozevich no longer had an easy line in the game, it was actually a good chance here to dramatically change the character of the position with 11...♘d7! 12.♕xb7 c5 13.d5. Black sacrificed a pawn, but has a lot of compensation for it, thanks to the open b-file and potential e6 break. The problem with every pawn sacrifice, though, is that a pawn has to be sacrificed.



12.h3!
A move of a great master. Now Black has trouble developing comfortably.
12...c5 Not seeing any easy solution, Moro resorts to creative ones.

The more natural continuation 12...♘d7 is well met by 13.g4! ♗e6 14.♗h6 ♖fd8 15.♕e3 when Black has a very cramped position.

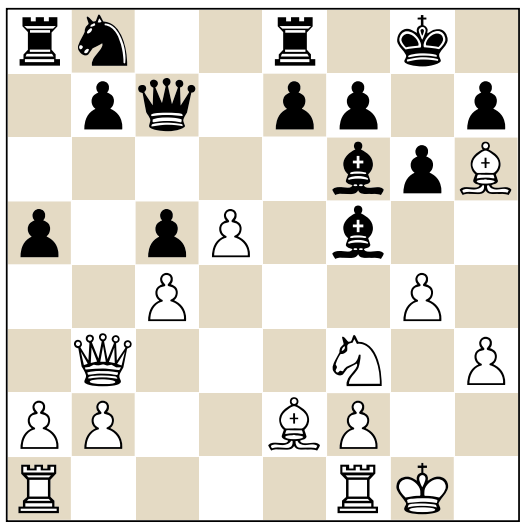
13.d5 a5 Creative, no doubt. On the horizon now is …a4-a3 and the knight or the rook can develop from a6. However, White is ahead in development and has more space, so he still has all the trumps.

14.♗h6 ♖e8

An option here was 14...a4 15.♕e3 a3, though it is not a particularly effective exchange sacrifice, since White will counter it with a sac of his own with 16.bxa3!

15.g4!

Powerplay! White is pushing back the bishop and gaining space on the king-side. While this move can sometimes be a weakness, here this is really not the case.



15...♗c8

What else, really, as ♗d7 takes away a square from the knight.

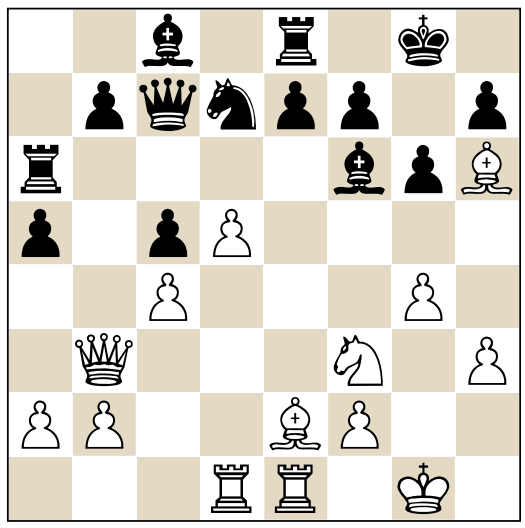
The only active alternative was 15...♗e4, but it loses a piece to 16.♘d2!.

16.♖ad1 ♘d7

Not really a problem was 16...a4, as White will simply sacrifice the b2-pawn with 17.♕e3 ♗xb2 18.d6, and it's easy to see Black will soon be in serious trouble, having no development and White's pieces menacingly swarning all over him, as after 18...♕a5 comes 19.♘g5!.

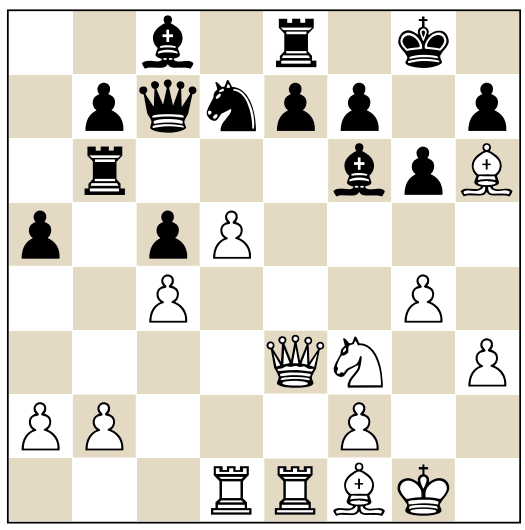
17.♖fe1 Simple and strong, as the rooks belong on open files.

17...♖a6



18.♗f1! It was not necessary to sacrifice a pawn, but Alexander Grischuk always plays in the most principled way. Also, there is 18.♕a3 followed by ♗f1 which is also good – but not as powerful as the continuation in the game.

18...♖b6 19.♕e3 Now that White is fully mobilised, he rightly felt that defending the b2-pawn is not worth getting distracted by.

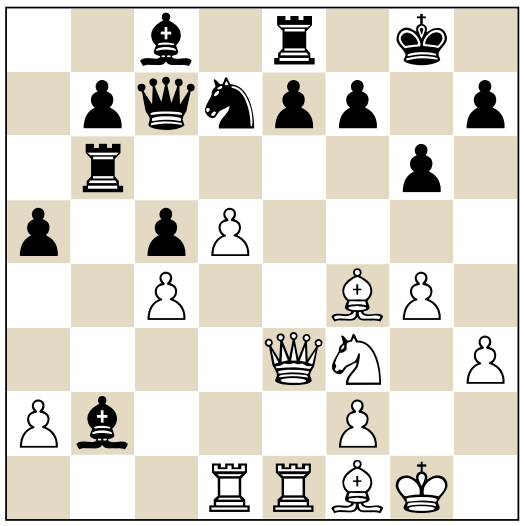


19...♗xb2

Black is also not playing all that bad; he seems to have everything protected, so carefully snatches a pawn. More active appears to be 19...♖xb2, but it allows the nasty pawn push of 20.g5 ♗h8 21.d6! ♕d8 22.dxe7 ♕c7 and now White can exploit his total domination in the game, with more lines being prised open and further forces coming, after 23.h4! followed by ♗h3 and h5, when Black really won't be able to survive the assault, especially with the e7-pawn being a big thorn in his position.

20.♗f4!

A beautiful – if somewhat obvious – regrouping of the bishop.



20...♕d8

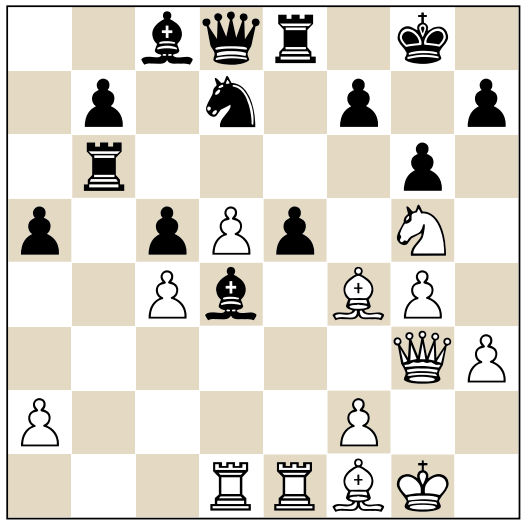
It looks sad, but what else is there?

21.♘g5!

Another one of those natural, yet very strong ideas. And what's worse for Black, is that it also allows White the strong option of putting the queen on g3.

21...♗d4 22.♕g3 e5!

The only way to counter the deadly threat of ♗c7. Here now, one might suddenly get confused – but not Alexander Grischuk!

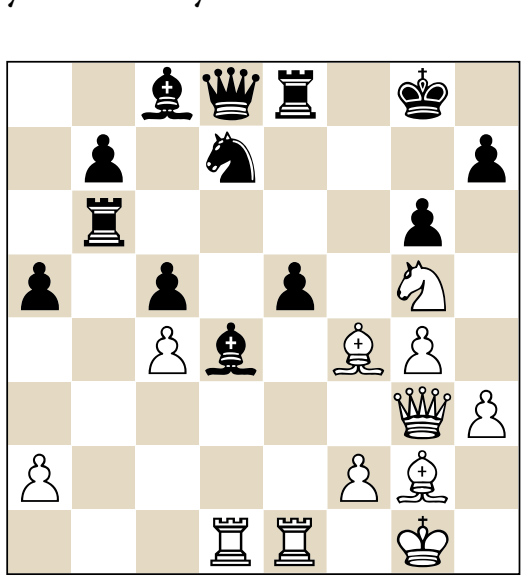


23.dxe6 fxe6 24.♗g2

Simple chess is always best. However the other option with 24.♘f3 would have been good, too.

24...e5

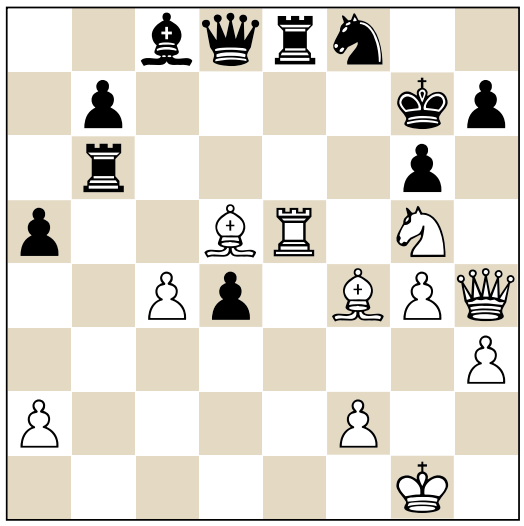
Black's position was beyond bad, so now he invites White to show his calculation skills. It was clear to everyone that Black can't survive so many pins and checks, but still it's far from easy to actually calculate it all out.



25.♗d2

This is the only time that Grischuk shows a sign of weakness. Failing to find the forced win, he did, though retain all the plusses of his position. The tactical win is actually simple and strong – but since it was, after all, a forced win, the move played can't be praised.

And if you haven't spotted it as yet, it's 25.♗d5+! ♔g7 26.♕h4 ♘f6 (not 26...♘f8, as this allows a juicy exchange sacrifice with 27.♖xd4! cxd4 (if 27...exd4 28.♖xe8 ♕xe8 29.♘f3! the king is defenceless) 28.♖xe5!



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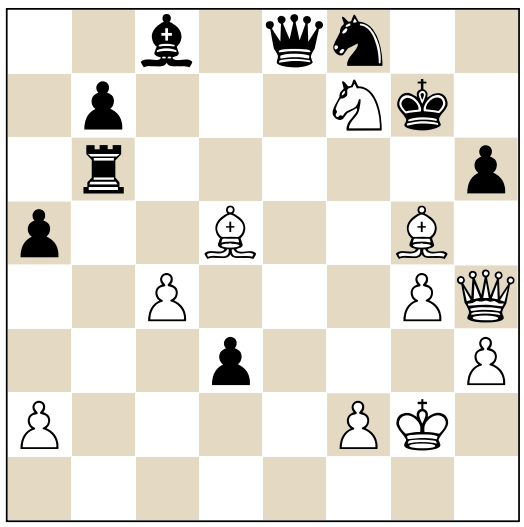
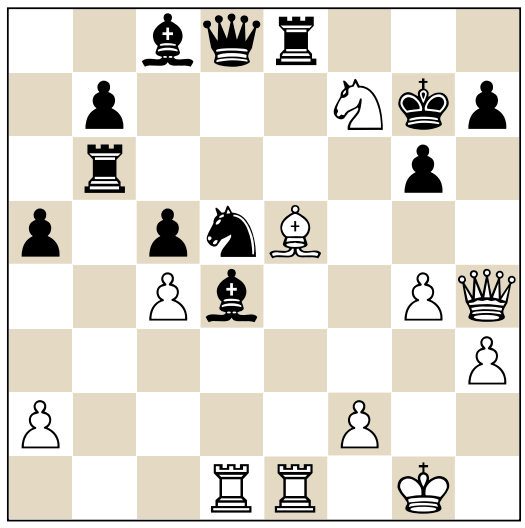
28...h6 And now comes a brilliant example of the definition of prophylaxis, with 29.♔g2!! d3 30.♖xe8 ♕xe8 31.♘f7 g5 32.♗xg5!



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

And White wins, though there is still work to do after 32...♕xf7! 33.♗xf7 hxg5 34.♕xg5+ ♔xf7 35.♕d5+ ♗e6 36.♕xd3) 27.♘f7 This wins the queen and the game, as after 27...♘xd5 there is 28.♗xe5+!



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

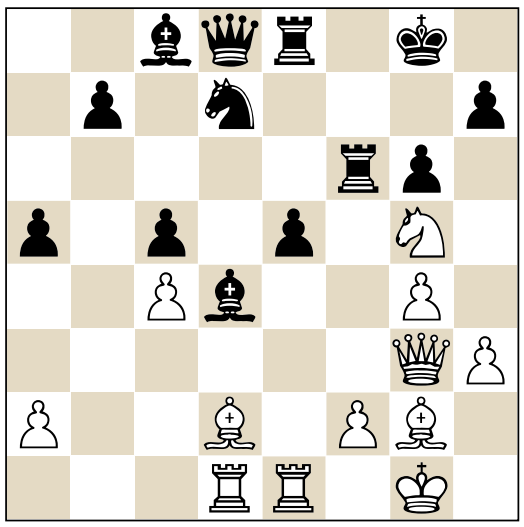
This could be what Alexander missed. Now, taking on f7 leads to mate (and note not 28.♘xd8? as 28...♘xf4 is simply taking over!), while after 28...♗xe5 29.♘xd8 Black does not have enough for the queen. Another option was 25.♕h4!? to win some material also, as 25...h5 allows a nice mating net with (25...♘f8 26.♗xe5!; 25...♘f6! (the most resilient) 26.♗d5+ ♗e6 (26...♔g7 27.♘f7!) 27.♗xe6+ ♖bxe6 28.♘xe6 ♖xe6 29.♗e3 and although White is up an exchange, I have to say that perhaps it's not that easy a job to convert) 26.gxh5 exf4 27.♗d5+ ♔f8 28.h6!!. Oops! Suddenly now there is a threat of ♘h7 mate. 28...♘f6 29.h7 ♔g7 30.♘f7 with ♕h6 mate to follow.

25...♖f6

Not helping much is 25...♔g7 as there's 26.♗d5 ♖f8 (if 26...♕e7 27.♘f3!) 27.♖e2 and White will win an exchange one way or the other, as ♘e6+ is a threat, and after 27...♘f6 there is the simple 28.♗xa5 ♘xd5 29.cxd5 ♕xg5 30.♗xb6 with an obviously winning position.

The best move looks to be 25...♖d6

as it attempts to hold on and limit the damage – but the problem is that after 26.♗d5+ ♖xd5 27.cxd5 ♘f6, the powerful bishop will get exchanged by either the knight (after ♘f3) or bishop (after ♗e3/♗c3), and then the position will soon collapse. One example being 28.♗c3 ♕xd5 29.♗xd4 cxd4 30.♕f3! ♕d6 31.♕b3+! ♕d5 32.♕xd5+ ♘xd5 33.♖xd4!.



26.♘f3!?

Interpolating a check first looked good too, such as in the line 26.♗d5+!? ♔g7 27.♘e4 ♖ff8 28.♗g5 ♕c7 29.♕h4 ♔h8 30.♗e7 – but what was played is simple enough. Surprisingly, Black's position is collapsing completely, together with the bishop on d4 that was holding his position together.

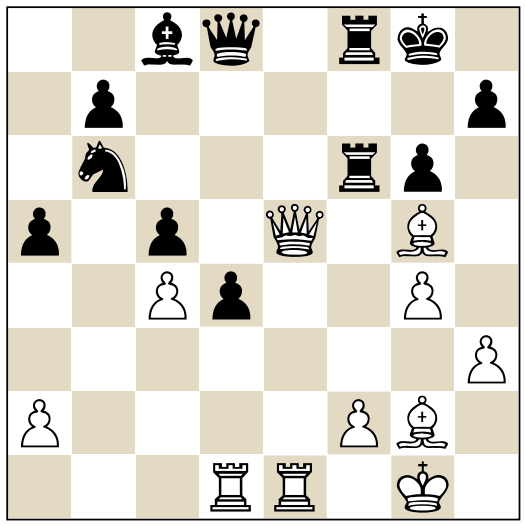
26...♘b6

The other option of 26...♖d6 appears to be the most resilient, but White has many ways to break through here, the most powerful being the simple 27.♘xd4 cxd4 28.f4!.

27.♘xd4 exd4 28.♗g5

Now White can win the exchange at any time, but more important here is the simple fact that he is still dominating the position.

28...♖ef8 29.♕e5!



29...♘d7 30.♗xf6

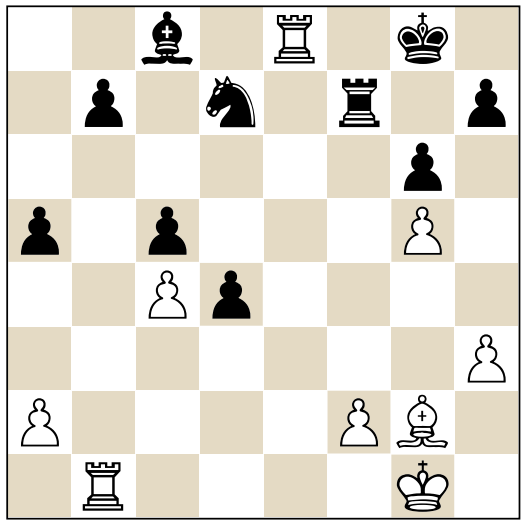
White decided it's time to cash in his chips.

30...♕xf6 31.♕xf6 ♘xf6 32.♖b1

The endgame is easily winning. Black is weak all over and still very uncoordinated.

32...♖f7 33.g5 ♘d7 34.♖e8+

The cutest way to win.



34...♖f8 35.♗d5+ ♔h8 36.♖be1

Black resigned. It's not easy to make a world class player like Morozevich look so silly, but this is just one of those games!

Vishy Anand

If you say 'young' about one of the greatest players ever, Vishy Anand, everyone will smile – even Vishy! Indeed, Vishy is not young, by whatever scale you measure it, but he no longer has any reason to prove anything to anyone. He has achieved everything there is to achieve in chess, and has done so more than once. Yet time and again he shows enterprising chess, as in this year's Gashimov Memorial and Norway Chess, where his play felt as young as ever. Here is one of his brilliant wins from the first tournament.

A20
Vishy Anand
Michael Adams
Shamkir 2015

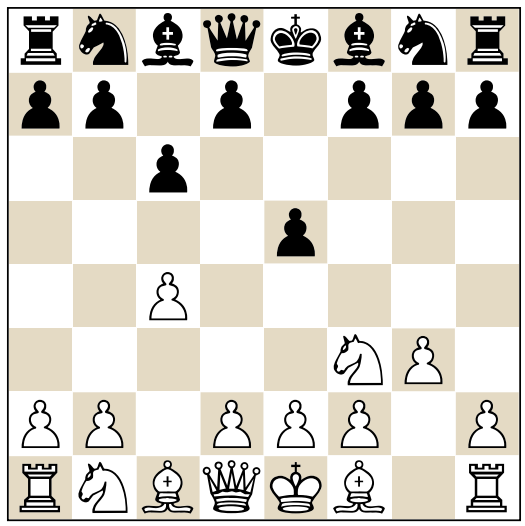
1.c4 For a while, Vishy was comfortably sitting on his database files that he had prepared for his match(es) with Carlsen, but he has moved on much faster than one would expect. In Shamkir, he showed new ideas against 1.e4, and in this game, he employs the English opening!

1...e5 2.g3 c6

A respected sideline popularised by the great Paul Keres. Black is basically playing the Alapin against the Sicilian, only a tempo down.

I also encountered 2...♘f6 3.♗g2 c6 in a recent game that I played in the Bundesliga against Csaba Balogh. It is somewhat confusing, as while sometimes they can transpose to each other, these systems are, nevertheless, different.

3.♘f3 Not the most popular move, but very principled, obviously. The main move here is 3.d4, and it's logical, too. Now Black has a wide choice, usually ...♗b4+ and exd4 are aimed at equalising, while ...e4 is more ambitious, and is aimed to confuse.



3...e4

Black is taking some responsibility; he has grabbed some space, but White will be ready to start breaking up the centre.

4.♘d4 d5

Once again, the most popular move, while .. .♘f6 and ...♕b6 are viable alternatives.

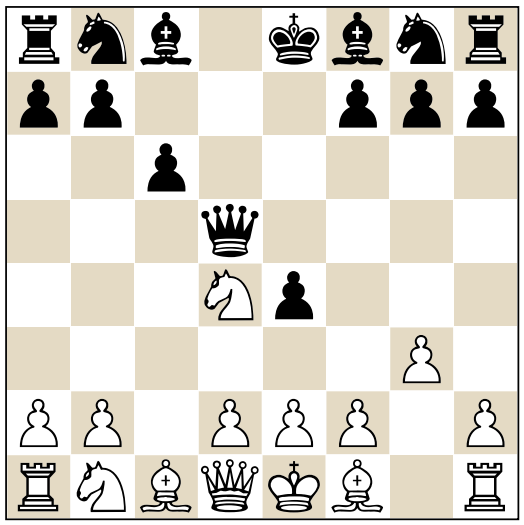
5.cxd5

I once played 5.d3 here in a similar position, with ♗g2 and ...♘f6 being included. Here it also looks interesting.

5...♕xd5

This is the usual idea in this varia-

tion, just like the Alapin Sicilian. If Black is to simply recapture with the pawn, then White should be able to gain an advantage after eventually getting in d3, thanks to his better development.

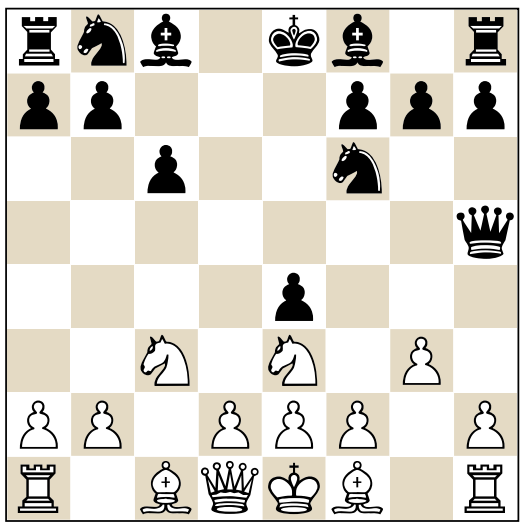


6.♘c2 Also possible was 6.e3 and 6.♘b3, but if you are to study this variation, I would recommend you follow Anand's path. That's generally my advice in all openings that Vishy plays!

6...♘f6 7.♘c3 ♕h5

A common response; the idea being to meet ♗g2 with ...♗h3. Now Anand plays an interesting idea.

8.♘e3!?



In a 2014 blitz game Svidler-Topalov, 8.d3 was played. However, 8.h3 seems like the most natural move to me, and was played by Levon Aronian against Peter Svidler in another blitz game, in 2010.

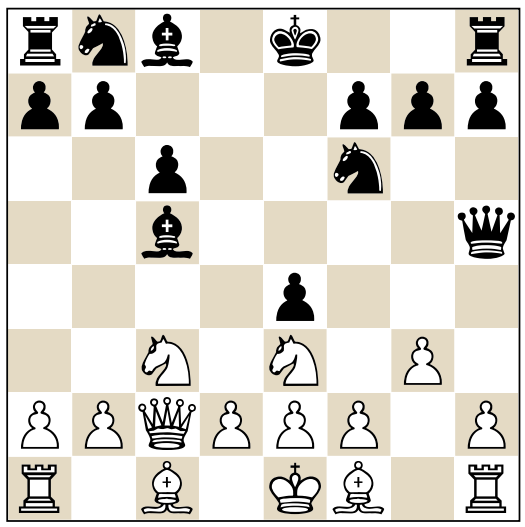
8...♗c5

The most natural response.

It is wrong to play 8...♗h3, since White hasn't played ♗g2 as yet. And indeed, the riposte 9.♕b3! asks some nasty questions, as in the game Berkes-Borisek, 2007.

9.♕c2 White's position doesn't impress, but the extra tempo that he has (compared to the variation 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 g6 3.c3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘d5 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4) really counts here. He is simply attacking the e4-pawn already!

> 'Vishy no longer has any reason to prove anything to anyone.'



9...♗xe3

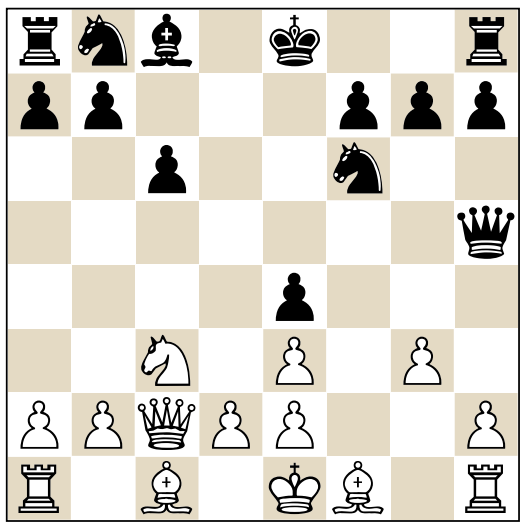
It makes sense to investigate the

Vishy Anand
Born: December 11, 1969
Country: India
Rating (August 1, 2015): 2816

Remarkable:
He is the only player to win the World Championship in all formats: match, round-robin tournament and knock-out tournament.

pawn sacrifice with the simple ...0-0 – but first of all, I don't know if Michael was prepared, and even if he was, I am not sure the pawn sacrifice is sound. A quick investigation discovers that after 9...0-0 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♕xe4 Black is indeed a pawn down and ♗g2 will soon happen, after which I ask the relevant question: so where is the compensation?

10.fxe3 A very original pawn structure. This could be bad for White, but Black will have trouble keeping the e4-pawn alive.



10...♕e5

The alternative of 10...0-0 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♕xe4 once again doesn't look sufficient.

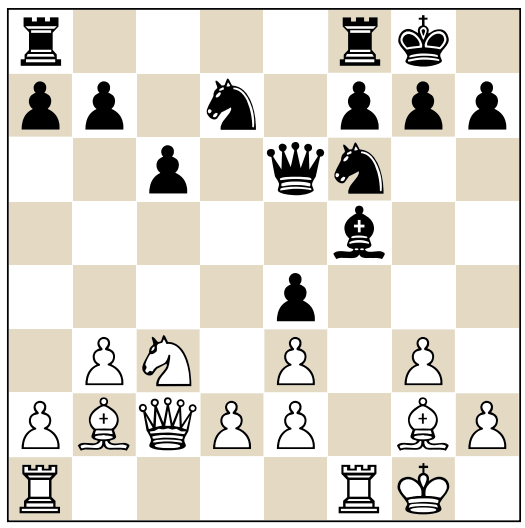
11.♗g2 ♗f5

Black did protect the poor pawn, but now it feels that he has lost some tempi with his queen.

12.0-0 0-0 13.b3

A more aggressive version of this move was 13.b4!? Now, after 13...♘bd7 14.♗b2 ♕e6, besides having the same exchange sac as in the game, the simple 15.b5 deserves some attention, as it creates discomfort with Black's queenside.

13...♘bd7 14.♗b2 ♕e6



15.♖xf5!

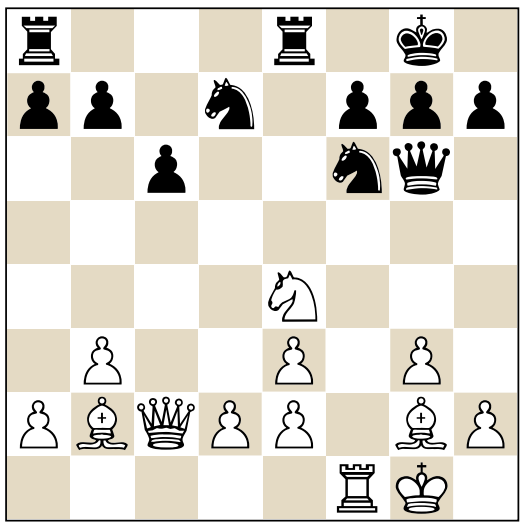
A brilliant positional exchange sac out of nowhere! In our game, played in the third round, before it was clear that Shamkir was to be Vishy's tournament (though Magnus won it, but who cares), Vishy sort of blundered an exchange to me, although it proved to be a 'correct' blunder. After that game (which ended in a draw, after I barely managed to escape), Vishy probably liked the taste of it and sacrificed a couple of more exchanges in the next few games, even more successfully. Usually the exchange sacrifice is the

Vishy Anand, one of the greatest players ever and definitely 'young' at the age of 45.

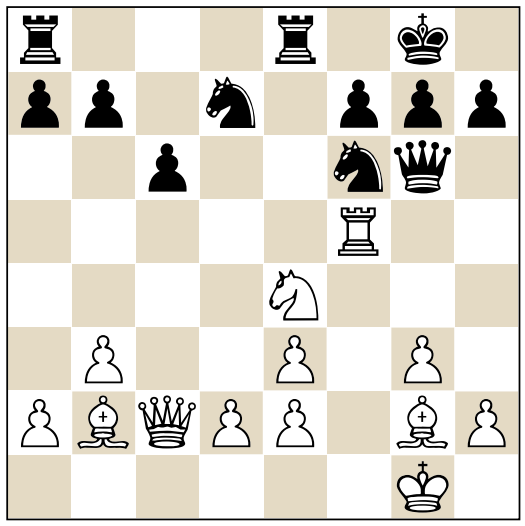
trademark of another ex-World Champion, Veselin Topalov, but as we can see, apparently Veselin doesn't own a patent for this motif.

15...♕xf5 16.♘xe4 The pawn block in the centre, combined with the bishop pair fully compensates for the exchange. Generally, I think it is accepted that two bishops and a pawn are at least worth a rook and a knight.

16...♕g6 17.♖f1 ♖fe8



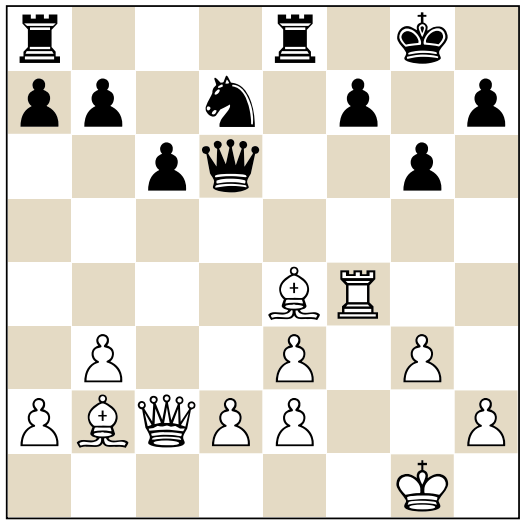
18.♗xf6 Simple – and although I wasn't sure really whether White was better, after all the simplifications, Vishy proves that White runs no risk. However, there was a very spectacular alternative – I am curious if Vishy saw it. It goes 18.♖f5!?



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

18...♘xe4 (18...♕xf5 19.♘xf6+ ♕xf6 20.♗xf6 ♘xf6 21.e4 and White is

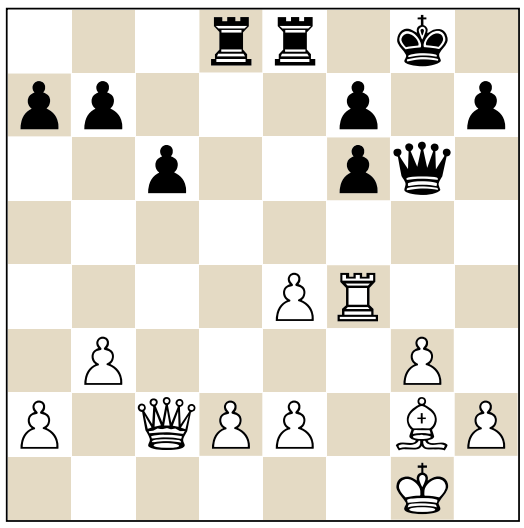
better here, thanks to his strong pawn centre and the somewhat closed nature of the position) 19.♗xe4 when White's position is looking threatening – and I have no doubt that I (and almost any other player) would definitely pick White here, though apparently after 19...♕d6 20.♖f4 g6



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

there's not much going on, according to the all-knowing silicon brain. I do believe, though that White should be better here, at least from a practical point of view, with such a gaping long b2-h8 diagonal.

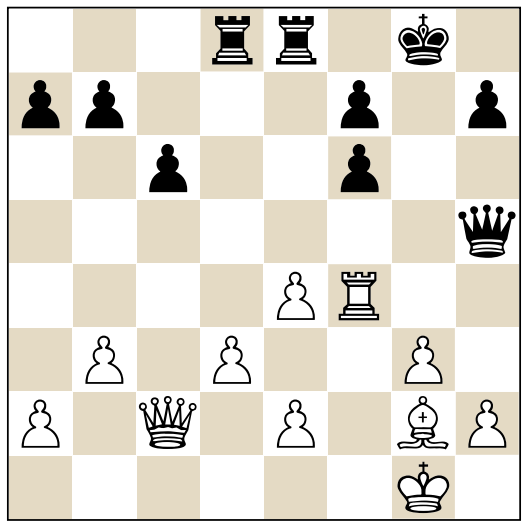
18...♘xf6 19.♘xf6+ gxf6 20.e4 ♖ad8 21.♖f4



I will repeat myself, I really didn't estimate this position as particularly better for White, but from this point onwards we should just watch what Anand does and nod in agreement. And 21.e3 is well met with 21...c5! stopping d4.

21...♕h5 22.d3

This creates some 'black holes' in White's position, but there is more to it, apparently.



22...♕e5 Maybe a little better was 22...♔g7, when White would probably move the bishop anyway, but at least on f3 it is a little less active: 23.♗f3 ♕a5 24.♖g4+ ♔h8 25.♔g2 ♖e5 and it's unclear, but White is very solid and doesn't risk anything. Objectively though, I still think Black should hold this position.

23.♗h3!

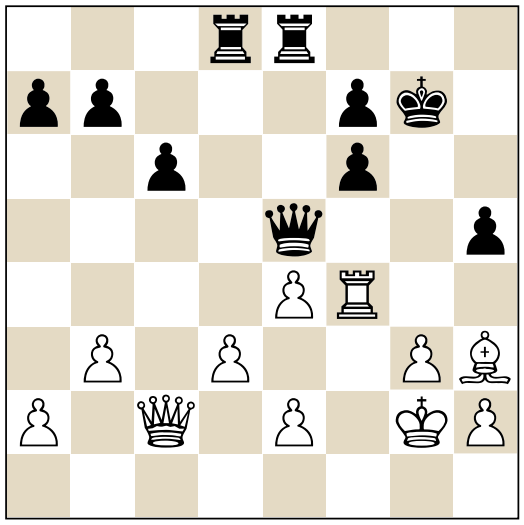
The bishop definitely has better prospects on h3, while the g2-square can be used by the king.

23...♔g7 24.♔g2

Now ♖f5-h5 is an idea, and Mickey decides to solve this problem in a radical way.

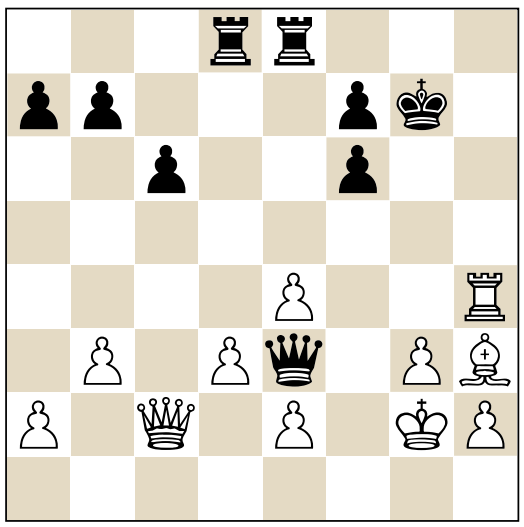
24...h5!?

It was probably okay to allow the rook to come to h5, but this pawn sac looks tempting, as Black will now gain a couple of important tempi.



25.♖f5 ♕d4 26.♖xh5 ♕e3! 27.♖h4!

A very strong move – it is important for White not to allow the exchange of rooks. 27.♗f5 ♖h8 would be easy life for Black.



27...♖e5!

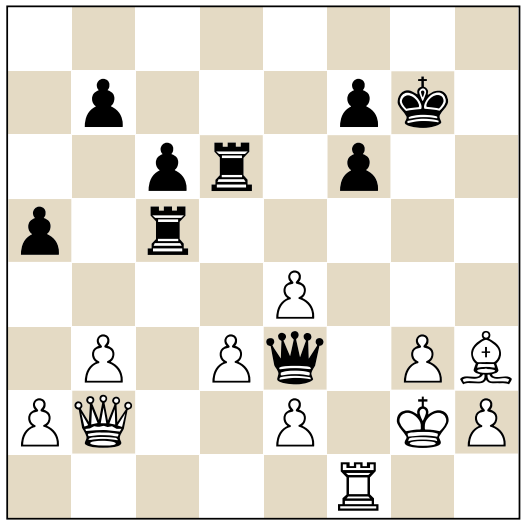
Mickey is on top of his game as well. The rook is ready to enter the c-file, and here I would probably overestimate Black's position, as it looks really fine now, having control of all the dark squares. In fact, White runs no risk, but I am probably not too wrong, as Black should be doing okay too.

28.♖f4 ♖c5 29.♕b2 ♖d6 30.♖f1

Stopping the invasion of the rook or the queen to c1. Still, Black should be okay, but here Mickey starts playing a little indecisively.

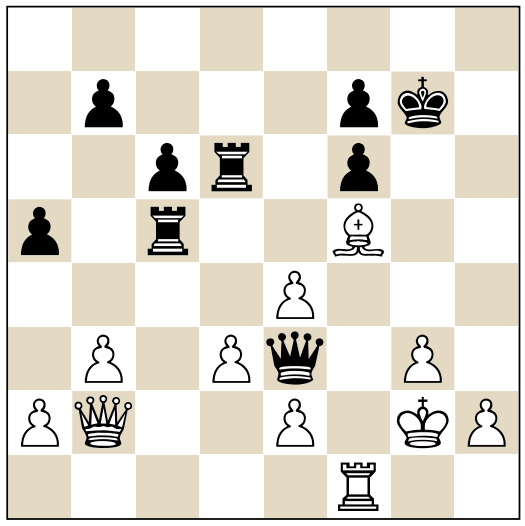
30...a5

So far, so good. An alternative was 30...♕d4!?, using the fact the the natural 31.♕d2 doesn't work. Now White's queen is really being pushed back, and Black would have had nothing to worry about: 31.♕b1 (31.♕d2 ♕xe4+! was the hidden point) 31...♕e3 32.♗g4 ♕d2! and the queens are really likely to come off, and Black is totally fine here.



31.♗f5!

Now ...♕d4 is well met with ♕d2! as the e4-pawn is protected.



31...b5!

A good plan of counterplay – the

rook is likely to appear on c3 and this will block the potential scope for the queen, as the lady had her eyes on f6.

32.h4 ♖d8? Alas, Mickey blinks. The rook was doing a good job on d6, and soon we will see why. What really had to be played here (as mentioned in the previous note) was 32...b4! and with the rook coming to c3, I don't see why Black would worry here. Neither would White, because in a way the position is quite empty now, with both sides having his forces almost ideally placed.

33.a3! A strong provocation.

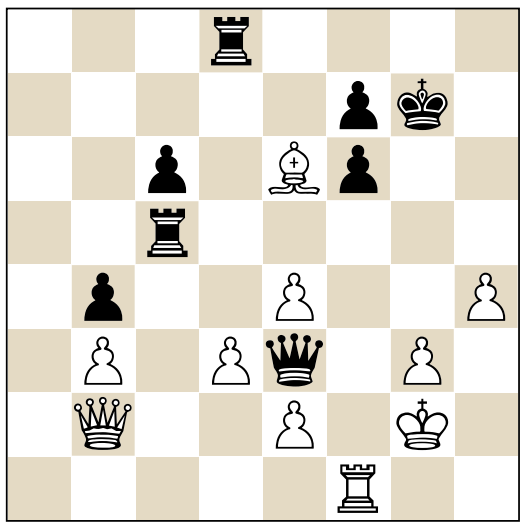
33...b4

The top suggestion initially from the machine of 33...♕d4 34.♕d2 ♕c3 is probably not very good. However the position after 35.♕f4! looks very dangerous indeed for Black.

34.axb4 axb4

So it would appear that Black is doing fine here – and indeed what is the difference between the position after 32...b4! and this one?

35.♗e6!!

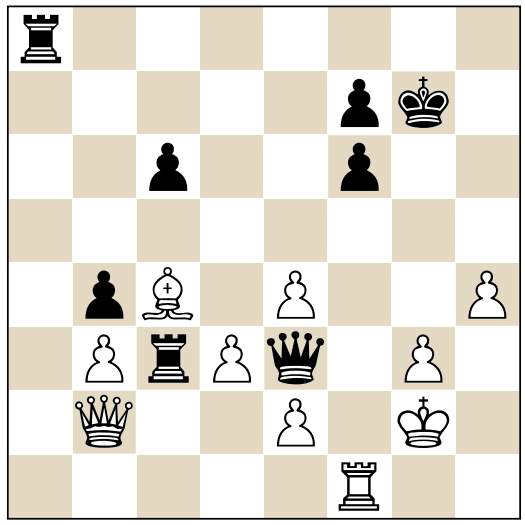


Vive la différence!, as the French would say. A nice tactical shot that also serves a positional purpose, what can be better than that?

35...♖c3 36.♗c4

The bishop is ideally placed on c4, where it cements the queenside and eyes the f7-pawn... just in case.

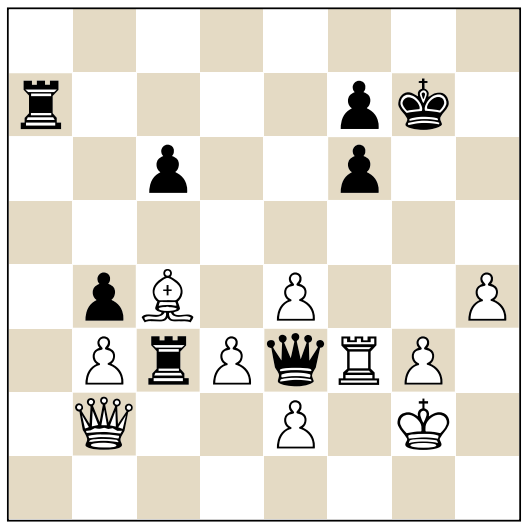
36...♖a8



37.♖f5?!

White can afford to lose a tempo, but there was certainly no need to, as 37.♖f3! ♕c1 38.♕xc1 ♖xc1 39.e5! would have been devastating.

37...♖a7 38.♖f3



38...♕c5? Probably Mickey didn't realise how hopeless his position will soon become, as the endgame would have offered chances for survival. For example 38...♕c1 39.♕xc1 ♖xc1 would be a really sad endgame for Black, since with the bishop on c4 he has no hope of ever creating

any passed pawn. Nevertheless, the endgame would offer some drawing chances, with patient defence.

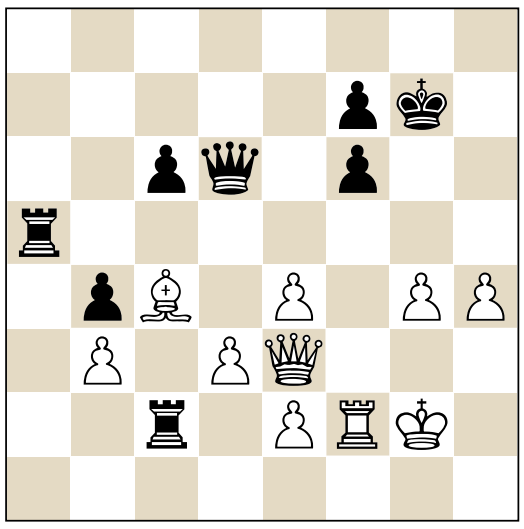
39.♕d2! Now the position is really bad for Black – his king is weak and White has never been as so well coordinated in this game.

39...♕d6 40.♕e3

There was the more brutal approach with 40.♖f5! followed by ♖h5, but Vishy chooses to assault slowly.

40...♖a5 41.♖f2 ♖c2 42.g4!

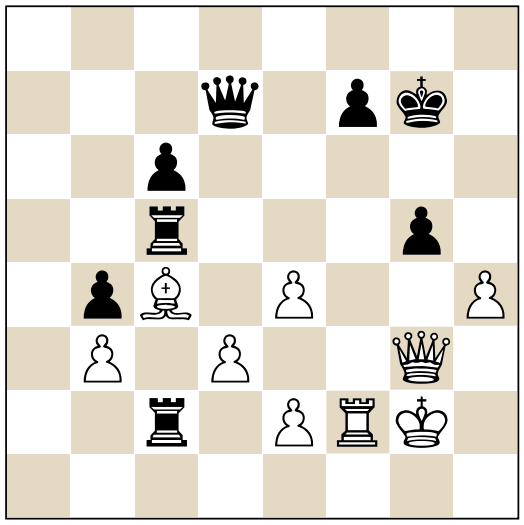
Advancing another unit into the fray.



42...♕d7 43.♕g3 ♖c5 Pretty hopeless was 43...♖xc4 44.dxc4, even though it was the best Black had. He is simply two pawns down here.

44.g5! Forcing matters.

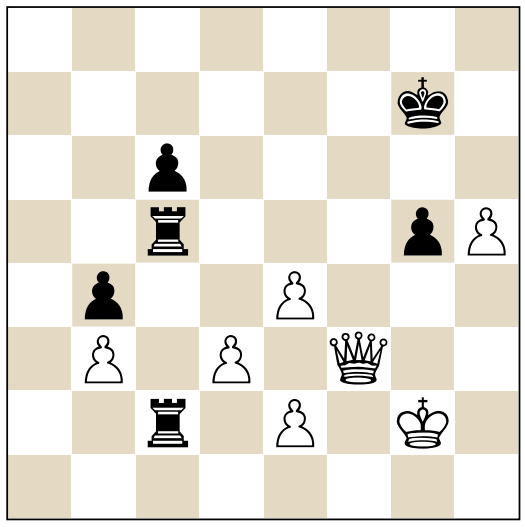
44...fxg5



45.♖xf7+ Not 45.hxg5? as it would allow some saving chances after 45...♖2xc4! 46.dxc4 ♕e7!.

45...♕xf7 46.♗xf7 ♔xf7 47.♕f3+ ♔g7 48.h5

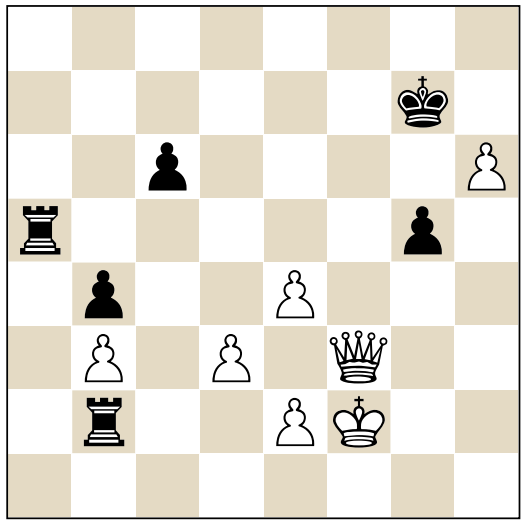
White is completely winning here. The rooks really have no way of doing White any harm whatsoever.



48...♖a5 49.♔f2 ♖b2

This loses a rook by force, but really the position was far beyond the lost mark. And in any case, 49...♖aa2 50.e5 is hopeless.

50.h6+!



50...♔g6 51.h7

And the b2-rook will be picked up with some checks. Black resigned. Not bad for an old man.

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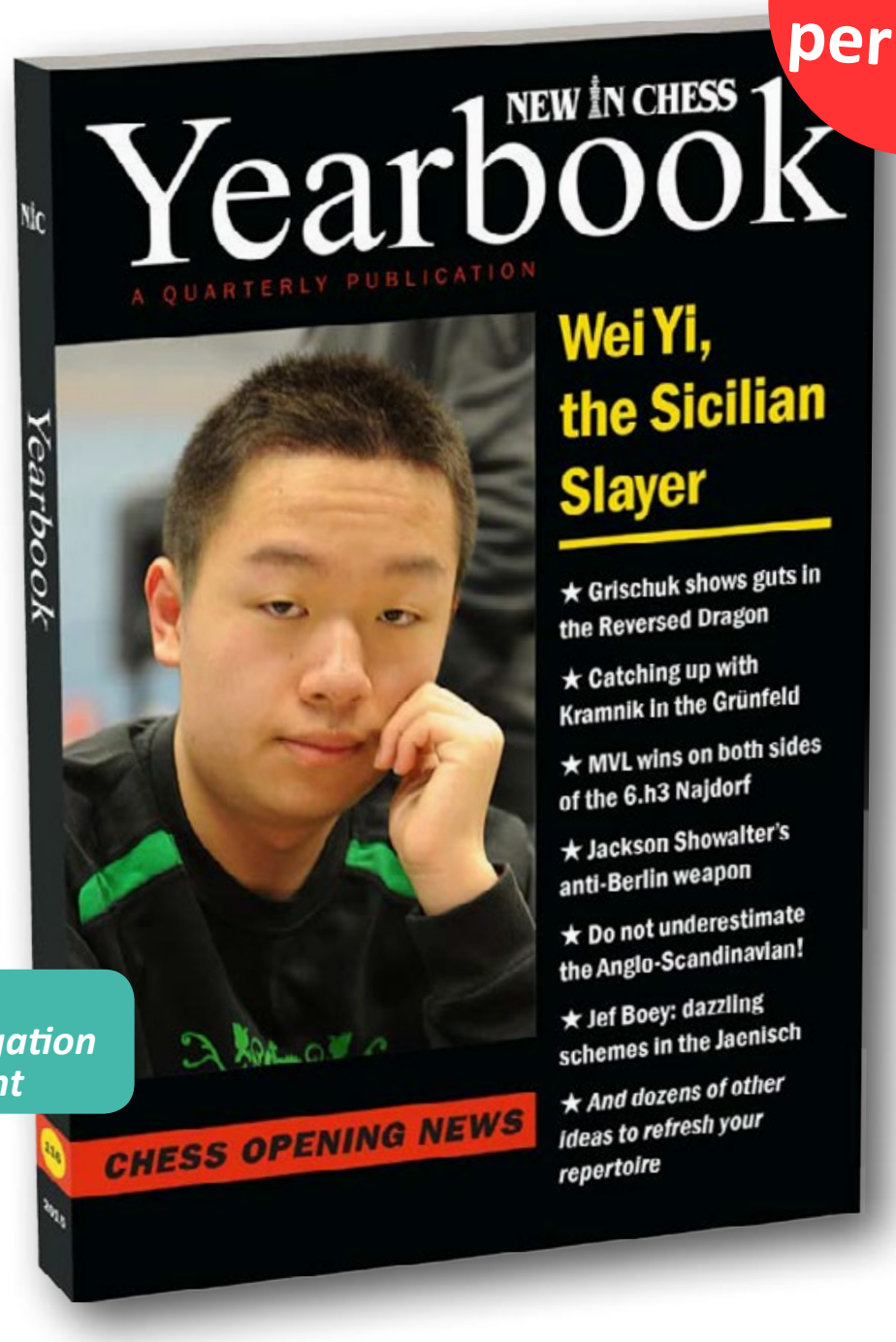
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